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WOMEN'S HUSBANDS.

I. THE BARBER OF MIDAS.

II. THE FALSE PRINCE.

III. NARCISSUS.

PHILADELPHIA:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.
1880.

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WOMEN'S HUSBANDS.

I.

THE BARBER OF MIDAS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE must surely have been a crisis in the history of the human race when the men held a mass-meeting and resolved to divide the virtues and vices between themselves and the other sex. Of course they reserved the nobler qualities, good and bad, for themselves, assigning the mean, base faults and petty, paltry merits to women, and proceeded to frame on this basis a series of axioms by which they have been solving the problems of life ever since; which perhaps is the reason why the proof does not always seem conclusive. If there was no such partition, how is it that the ancients illustrated by masculine types the very foibles which are now accepted as characteristics of women? Personal vanity, gossip, curiosity, cowardice, and so on through the entire catalogue of the now so-called feminine weaknesses, are exemplified in Greek mythology by men. It cannot be that the sexes have interchanged characters through the development of the species and the progress of science: history bears witness to the contrary. Leæna and Epicharis kept the secrets which men had blabbed. The great scandal-mongers of literature have been men. Madame de Sévigné was not so inveterate a gossip as Horace Walpole. And do we find that our private experience justifies this arbitrary distribution of the moral qualities when we confine ourselves strictly to modern instances?

Within the memory of living men there lived in one of our principal cities a gentleman of middle age and good fortune known to his contemporaries, and even to younger men, as Jem Rushworth. He was one of the most popular men in the place, which was due partly to his appearance and manner, for a well-built man of fifty-five, natty in his dress, jaunty in his bearing, with a ready smile and chirruping voice, always glad to see you, is an agreeable object, and few people take the trouble to look further for grounds of liking. His looks were certainly in his favor: crisp pepper-and-salt hair and whiskers heightened the cleanly freshness of his complexion, and his figure had not lost the outline nor his eyes the brightness of youth. He was still nominally in business, but his occupation was limited to looking in at the office for a couple of hours a day, the rest of which he passed in dropping in and out of the Exchange, the Board of Brokers, the Public Library and other respectable resorts, where he was sure of finding acquaintance. Rushworth's wife was much younger than himself, but much less well-preserved: she did not look old, but faded—a pale, slight woman with an impassive oval face, traces of prettiness and an indestructible refinement and elegance. Mrs. Rushworth's health had broken down early: she nearly died when her son was born, and the physicians announced that a second child would probably cost her life. In a year she had another: she lived, but was a confirmed invalid from that time forth. She never left the house except to drive: her husband, on the contrary, was always ready to accept an invitation, so that for social purposes he was as good as a bachelor—an old bachelor at least—and better company than old bachelors generally are. He laughed heartily at good stories, and told them himself, and he knew so much more about everybody's affairs than they did themselves that his advent always caused a stir of welcome at the club when the men had been smoking and soaking until they were stupid. He liked to do everybody a good turn, and would bustle about to serve them, and was not particular about his associates. Mrs. Rushworth had been particular about hers even before her seclusion; so many people thought that Jem Rushworth's

wife was a bit of a Tartar in her quiet way, and that the old fellow found other houses pleasanter than his own.

In the latter surmise they were not mistaken, but Mrs. Rushworth did not find home very cheerful herself after her only son, who was in the navy, went on his first long cruise, and her only daughter married and went off to Europe for her wedding-trip. She was so accustomed to dulness that she would not have thought of seeking an escape from it, although the absence of the young life made it immeasurably more oppressive; but her husband, who was very fond of her, gave her no rest about what he called "having a change." She assured him repeatedly that she needed none, wished for none—that the quiet and comfort of her own house were more to her than change of scene and climate would be: she saw that she must let him talk about it until he should find another hobby.

Late one November afternoon he came into her room, where she was lying on her lounge in the twilight before the embers of a wood-fire. He was going out to dinner in an hour, but was already dressed, and did not know what to do with himself in the mean time.

"Lucy my dear, why don't you have another log on the fire?" and he was about to put one on from a basket which stood beside the hearth.

"Because I am warm enough, thank you."

"Better have another;" and he threw it on: "the fire is going down and the room will grow chilly. That is the way you make yourself ill."

"The room is too hot as it is," she said in that tone between desperation and resignation which may be detected so often in the voice of a woman who has been married over ten years.

"Shall I light the gas? You'll get the blues sitting in the dark."

"No, I like the firelight better."

Nevertheless, Mr. Rushworth began to grope about for the matches, upsetting various small objects in his search; whereupon his wife took the match-box from a table beside her and slipped it under the *sofa-cushion.*

"You won't be able to find them," she observed quietly.

"How can I in the dark? Whereabouts are they?"

"Not on any of the tables. Do sit down."

After a little more futile fidgeting he gave it up and sat down: "Lucy, I really feel very anxious about you. I wish you could be persuaded to do something."

"There is no cause for anxiety, James. I am as well as I have been for twenty years."

"I don't think so: you were not given to moping in the dark until you were chilled through, when Jem and little Lucy were at home."

"No, not when Jem and little Lucy were at home."

"I'll tell you what. I haven't been to Cuba since I went out for the firm in 1850, just after the Lopez affair: I spent the winter there then—1850–51. The place is an earthly paradise—orange-groves and palm trees; women in mantillas, smoking their cigaritas, driving up and down in a sort of open carriage they call a volante; opera, carnival, masked balls; the most delicious chocolate you ever tasted, frothed in a little mill. Then on the sugar-plantations I lived like a prince—horse at the door every morning if I chose to ride. I must have told you about it."

"Yes, frequently."

"Well, now that's the very place for you. I can't be away from the office all winter, but we'll take the first steamer in December. You'll have time to see Havana thoroughly and run down into the country, where I'll show you an old flame of mine, grown fat by this time, I'm afraid; but what eyes she had in those days! and what a foot! We can take the steamer back, which will give us a month's trip. I'm a capital sailor, so every day will be a holiday."

"But I am a very bad one, you know, and I should not get over the voyage for the whole winter."

"To be sure: what a pity! I should like to see Pepita again, and fresh bananas. You've no notion what a banana is until you eat it fresh: all that come here

are picked unripe. Yes, I recollect you never could bear the motion of a vessel. Sweet, pretty Pepita! We were very soft about each other: she cried when I bade her good-bye, and I coaxed her out of one of her ringlets: it was a yard long, glossy as jet, and smelt of orange-blossoms, I remember, which I took as a good omen. I wasn't to sail for a week, so I promised to go back for a day, though that meant travelling for eighteen hours: there was no railroad into the interior then. Dear me! dear me! I carried the curl in my waistcoat-pocket: you can guess which one. A couple of days afterward I took off my coat to play a game of billiards with Brown, our correspondent there: he was an Englishman, and he gave me a poke in the midriff with his cue and said, 'I thought you were such a jimmy fellow, Rushworth: you've a grease-spot on your waistcoat the size of a five-bob.' I should think I had!—exactly the sort of annular mark you see on a curl-paper. I don't know whether Brown twigged or not. I did not go back to Las Palmas: that was the name of the plantation. He married Pepita afterward. Dear girl! she must have cared for me, though, to sacrifice that long tress. Bless me! I haven't thought of it for five-and-twenty years." Mr. Rushworth was silent for some time, lost in pleasing retrospection. By and by he resumed: "As you can't stand the sea, suppose we go to San Francisco by rail, see the Big Trees, the Yo Semite Valley—finest scenery in this country, and something so new? I've always wanted to see California. We could do that in a month."

"I suppose we might if I went in a palanquin: I could not go in any other way."

"I think you might, Lucy: you know the Pullman cars are moving palaces—every luxury. You can lie down the whole way from here to San Francisco as if you were on your own sofa."

"Why, then I think I am as well off on my own sofa."

"Oh, I'll tell you: I'll take you to Washington for a week when Congress meets. The session is likely to be very interesting: you will see all the leading men of the country. The receptions of the members of the cabinet are brilliant: the diplomatic circle makes the parties there so agreeable—gives one an idea of foreign society, you know. That's the thing exactly: it's no journey at all, and it will wake you up and shake you out of your grooves."

"I should think so. Inasmuch as I cannot sit up for two hours, and have not been to a party for twenty years, it does not strike me as exactly the thing. Can't you think of something else?" This was spoken in a languid, half-satirical tone, in which she revenged herself upon her husband when he bothered her.

He burst into a little explosion of temper: "That's just like you, Lucy—always putting obstacles in the way of what I propose and interfering with my enjoyment. The house is deucedly lonely since the children left it, and if you don't mind being dull, I do. I wonder what o'clock it is?"

She drew out the match-box and struck a light: he turned up the gas: "There! I ought to have gone ten minutes ago: you have made me late." So saying, he hurried off, having plenty of time, as his wife knew, He got over his crossness on the way, arrived in excellent spirits, and told the story of Pepita in the course of the dinner amid general hilarity.

The lighting of the gas had ended Mrs. Rushworth's twilight hour. She opened a book, but her eyes soon began to ache, so she took up her knitting instead. There was truth in what her husband had said about the house being lonely for him. He was not much in it, but she remembered how lively he and Lucy had made it, and how it had rung and resounded when Jem was at home. She turned over many plans for making it more cheerful, but none of them were feasible until it occurred to her to ask one of her husband's nieces to spend the winter with them. These nieces were the daughters of a widowed sister who lived in another State. She had not seen them since they were children, so that it was an experiment, but her sister-in-law was a nice

woman, and Mr. Rushworth, who paid them a flying visit every year, was fond of them. When his wife proposed the plan to him he was delighted. He had an affectionate disposition, and liked young people and their society, and the prospect of again taking a pretty girl to a round of balls and parties was inspiriting. His sister's girls were all pretty: he hoped she would send his pet Phœbe, and so he intimated in a postscript to his wife's letter of invitation. The answer came that Phœbe was too young, and Susy, the eldest, could not be spared, but that Sylvia, who was twenty, should pay them a visit. Mr. Rushworth did not take the substitution to heart, but before his niece arrived he began to fidget and fret about her coming to such an extent that his wife would have regretted the invitation had she ever allowed herself to regret a step on account of her husband's afterthoughts. She was condemned to hear over and over again that the exertion would be too great for her; that the child would be homesick and miss her sisters; that, for his part, he felt the responsibility of taking another person's daughter into society as altogether too heavy.

"I think I'll run on and spend Thanksgiving with them—it is a day when one wants the society of young folks—and then I can talk it over with them."

He went and returned, bringing the young girl back with him, and having forgotten all his misgivings.

Sylvia Woodbridge's appearance was in keeping with her name. A lover generally thinks that no woman in the world looks like his mistress: Sylvia's lovers—and she had more than one—would have been excusable in this infatuation, for she had a most individual and uncommon physiognomy. Her features were irregular, short and too marked: the first thing you saw in looking at her was a pair of remarkable eyes, dark gray and very large, bordered by such long and exceedingly thick eyelashes, and set close under such thick, dark eyebrows, that they had a singular expression, shy and untamed; her hair grew very low upon her forehead, and was also dark and immensely thick and wavy; a pale, clear complexion gave relief to these points and to a faint dark line of down on a very short upper lip, beneath which her small, pointed teeth gleamed with unusual brilliancy. Her figure was barely of middle height, slight, round and elastic, and her movements were strong, light and free. There was something about her that made one think of a pretty, wild creature, but not a fawn: she was not timid enough for that. As her aunt surveyed her in her sealskin coat and cap on the evening of her arrival, she thought that if some graceful, furry little dweller of the forest could take human form it would look like this. The resemblance ran through her character and bearing, which were strikingly independent and informal. She had been well brought up, and was not in the least a "girl of the period," but a natural inaptitude for conventionality betrayed itself in an abruptness of manner which often ran into antagonism. She was not what is called a general favorite: young ladies did not like her; she had no intimate friend except her elder sister; older men and women were not apt to fancy her either, but to young men she was very attractive. For a couple of years past two or three young fellows had been dangling about her, dancing with her whenever opportunity offered, taking her to sleigh in winter or drive in summer, for such were the easy, informal customs of B——. Young men and maiden were all somewhat youthful to think of marriage, and some of the former could not afford it; so there had been no serious love-making. One of them had made an impression, about the depth of which she was uncertain. It was Philip King, the lion of their young set, the handsomest and best dressed, the best dancer and skater: he had more ready money and replies than the rest; the flowers and bonbons he sent were handsomer. He had the reputation of being a flirt, and was reported to have made a vow that he would never be refused. Sylvia had been the principal object of his admiration for a year, but not the only one: it was part of his tactics to divide his attentions among sev-

eral young ladies in such proportions as left each one in uncertainty which he preferred, while he was committed to none of them. He had effected less with her by this system than with any girl upon whom he had tried it, and the result had been to increase his desire to awaken or discover some sign of special interest in her. Sylvia was protected in some degree by her lack of intimacies and confidences: she did not know of every time that he sent flowers or sugar-plums to other girls. There was, besides, a dogged streak in her disposition which prevented her from yielding to curiosity about what he did when he was not with her. Neither his admiration nor his strategy had been without effect, yet her liking for him sometimes alternated with a repulsion which made her think she should not care if she never saw him again: then after a week's absence she found herself growing restless and depressed. Her aunt's invitation brought her to an understanding with herself: her impulse to refuse it, her reluctance to pass four or five months cut off from Philip King, determined her to go. The separation would be a test of his feelings as well as her own. So she began her winter in A—— with a little romance on her hands.

Mrs. Rushworth, whose letters were more gracious than her spoken words, had put her invitation in the form of a petition that one of her nieces would come and cheer their lonely house: Sylvia, knowing her aunt to be an invalid, had supposed that this meant a very quiet winter for herself. She found that she was to be gayer than at home: her aunt's only fear was that it might be dull for her; her uncle was ready to attend her everywhere, and discovered at the end of twenty-four hours that she, not Phœbe, was his pet. Her cousin Lucy's friends came to see her, and she might have slipped at once into the vacant place in their circle, but, as usual, the young girls did not take to her. As usual, too, the young men did: it was not long before an evening at home brought rings at the street-door and cards to summon Sylvia from her place at the foot of her aunt's couch down to the stiff, ceremonious parlor, where there was a centre-table under a chandelier and a chimney-place closed with a marble slab, and the sofas stood against the walls. The aspect of this room made Sylvia uncomfortable, yet she could not amend it: at home it was Susan who made things look cozy, and it would have seemed to her a liberty to alter the position of a piece of furniture in her aunt's house. The latter rarely saw the room, and when she did glance into it on her way to or from her daily drive, to assure herself that it was tidy, a hopeless shrug at its dreariness was her only comment. The comfort of the house had insensibly gathered about her in her bedroom and the library, which was where she generally spent the evening, as it did not involve much going up and down stairs.

At first the sound of a young girl's footstep and dress in the passages, the party-going and evening visitors, gave her a pang of jealousy that her absent daughter's place should be filled by another; but she soon became interested in her niece, and glad to have her coming and going as Lucy used to do. She found herself listening with a little of the old curiosity to her husband's accounts of Sylvia's partners — accounts so circumstantial that they might have come from Argus, although, as she knew, a child could throw dust in his eyes. Mrs. Rushworth was not generous about these communications: she did not lose a word of them, yet would not encourage her husband by inquiries, listening in the same slightly contemptuous silence as when he retailed the club-gossip or down-town talk. In this way she gradually ascertained who were her niece's most assiduous admirers, while he was always on a wrong scent. But this is anticipating.

During Sylvia's first week in A——, while she was still a stranger and a little homesick, Philip King was never out of her thoughts, and she asked herself with some alarm what was to be the end of it if absence was teaching him to think of her less, while it taught her to think of him more. As she took her place in her

uncle's house, made acquaintance with the outer world, and was gently drawn into the festivities of A——, he was not for ever present. This seemed natural: everything was new and unfamiliar, nothing was associated with him, neither people, places nor amusements; nothing suggested him. It made her melancholy, but how much worse it would have been, she thought, if he had gone away from B—— and she had stayed at home! How she would have missed him at every hour and every turn! His name occurred in her letters from home, but not prominently. He came less often to the house: this proved conclusively, what she already knew well enough, that he came for her sake only; but would he not go oftener if he cared for news of her? Perhaps he kept aloof to punish her for refusing to correspond with him: she had been sorry for that ever since, and yet was pleased with herself. If her visit to A—— had proved entirely uneventful, she would probably have gone back to B—— in the belief that Philip King was necessary to her happiness; but before a fortnight had passed her ideas were waked up and shaken in all directions.

One day at dinner her uncle produced a letter from his pocket and held it up to her: "Who has been writing to you to my office, Miss Silly, I should like to know?"

"Somebody who doesn't know the number of the house, uncle, I suppose," she replied, holding out her hand for the letter.

"I have not seen the writing before: it's a man's hand, the postmark is B——, and the seal—for it has that useless luxury—is a dog's collar with the motto *Toujours fidèle*, so I presume it is from a young puppy."

Sylvia, who knew that motto, reddened and held out her hand again.

"Oh ho! blushes? Come, I've a right to inquire, since I am your guardian and chaperon. Shall I open it and see whether it is proper for you to have it or not?"

"If you choose," replied Sylvia, laughing but uneasy. She did not feel sure that the letter was not an offer. Her uncle deliberately broke the seal and was proceeding to tear off the envelope, taxing his niece's self-command to the utmost, as she had not supposed he would carry the joke so far. Fortunately, Mrs. Rushworth was at table, and being aware that her husband's curiosity knew neither scruple nor compunction, she took the letter from his hand and passed it to Sylvia.

"That's the way with women—always in league! Read it to us."

"Not until I have read it myself, if you please."

"Well, then, read it yourself."

"That would not be proper at table."

He teased and she parried, with the letter safe in her pocket, until dinner was over, when she escaped to her room and read it with mingled relief and disappointment. It was both lively and sentimental: some of the sentences meant more to Sylvia than they would have done to her uncle. It was the nearest thing to a love-letter she had ever received, and it gave a new animation to her manner and depth to her eyes, which made her unusually striking and attractive at her party that evening. Among the young men then presented to her was one who had formerly been rather an admirer of her cousin Lucy Rushworth, and one for whom her aunt had a real regard. He had impressed Mrs. Rushworth as having more decided character and opinions than any other man of his age who came to the house, and she thought that even his strong prejudices did him more credit than the general ignorance or indifference of most young men. She was not often mistaken in her estimate of people: George March had more force than he knew what to do with every day. He would have made a distinguished general or admiral if he could always have been in active service; or the president of a railway in a strike; or a bank-director in a panic. He had intelligence and decision enough for any emergency, but although the strength of his mind and character enabled him also to keep quiet better than shallow and weak men, they were in a great measure wasted in his mercantile life. The repressed power was sometimes felt unpleasantly in his intercourse and

daily dealings, nor did it make his own track smoother for him: it often produced upon others a sense of collision when there was none, like the bump one receives in a railway-carriage when the brakes are suddenly put down. Yet he was called a good fellow and liked for his common sense, manliness and humor. In many respects he was what is called "a man's man," but he preferred the society of the other sex, partly because he was less impatient of their follies and inconsistencies than of those of men, and they gave him rest from a sort of wear and weight which his own disposition produced upon him. They attracted him too: he was conscious of the special charm of every woman, and was drawn to them by whatever drew men of any sort. He had been in love more than once, but never completely carried away, and he had never addressed a woman, although he had not, like Mr. King, registered a vow that he would never be refused. He did women the injustice of expecting them to be better than men: he required to feel an absolute trust such as no woman had yet inspired him with, and such as he felt for no man.

George March's apparent insensibility roused the curiosity and aggression of the other sex. There was hardly a young woman of his acquaintance who had not been tempted to try his mettle at some time or other: they had all remained with blunted weapons, some with a slight wound from the double-edged blade. He had not always escaped scathless, but nobody suspected it. Each fair antagonist fancied herself the only one, and he was never enumerated among the "ladies' men" of A——.

He was not as much struck by Sylvia as young men generally were, and his first visit was a mere act of courtesy. He called in the morning, not expecting to be admitted: he stayed only a short time, and they talked of the most indifferent matters, yet he left the house with the impression that one might trust this girl. From that moment she interested him, and although she was neither so pretty nor so gentle as he liked women to be, he wished to see and know more of her. How many cases called love at first sight are more than this? An agreeable impulse is received and yielded to; no obstacle or interruption occurs to check its progress; matters glide on happily to the orthodox conclusion, and one or both parties affirm for ever after that they were captives of Cupid from the first hour. No account is taken of the occasions when an inopportune journey or one of the hundred smaller accidents of life have obliterated first impressions to the full as pleasing.

George March had plenty of chances to see Miss Woodbridge without alarming her or himself by over-eagerness in his pursuit. The gayeties of the winter threw them together two or three times a week, and his former intimacy with her cousin justified more frequent visits than he might otherwise have paid her: the habit of a house makes these first steps easier. Her greatest safeguard against needless alarms, to which she was not subject by nature, was that the recollection of Philip King still preoccupied her. After the pleasure of receiving his letter had come the question of replying to it. She had refused to correspond with him —in the first place, because it was a concession which she was unwilling to make under the circumstances; secondly, because she could not do so without her mother's permission, which she was too shy to ask. These objections were as strong as ever, but the temptation was greater: she knew, however, that she could get over the first if it were not for the second. She was reserved and secretive, with an abhorrence of having what she did talked over: even to her sister she had never spoken of her predilection for Philip King. If she should tell her mother of his letter and ask leave to answer it, she would undoubtedly mention it to Susy, and they would discuss it in a way which, although perfectly natural and delicate, it made Sylvia wince to think of. If she begged her mother not to speak of it to her sister, that was at once making it a mystery, which Sylvia disliked almost as much as publicity, and would give the matter a false importance and significance which might

lead to mistakes or impel her mother to withhold her consent. So she resolved the question into whether she should write and tell Mr. King that she could not receive his letters, or let him go on writing without a reply if her silence should not check him, as she supposed it would do. After some hesitation she chose the latter course. She waited for the result of her silence in suspense, saying to herself that if he did not write within a fortnight she should not expect any longer; but she began expecting the day after his first letter came, which promised to make the term she had fixed seem a very distant one. At the end of a week she made up her mind that he would not write, and felt dull and disappointed: she knew how the girls of B—— had spoiled him, and thought he might be estranged by an opposite course.

In the mean time, Philip King was expecting on his side. His first letter was an experiment: he thought that Sylvia might repent of her refusal and be glad of an opportunity to recede from her position without a formal retreat. He did not expect to hear from her immediately, but when a week passed without bringing a letter he guessed that she did not mean to write. He knew that the impulse to do so would be strongest at first, and that if she resisted it then, she would not give way afterward. This deranged his plan: he had reckoned on her forbidding him to write, and his writing to remonstrate, and her writing again to repeat the prohibition, which he should again disobey and establish the correspondence. His motives for persistence were many and mixed, but chiefly two—to prevent separation from lessening their intimacy, and to prove to her, himself and others that her going away was not such an act of independence and indifference as he discovered that it was accounted in their small world. He was by no means sure of his own feelings or "intentions," as a young man's dreams and hopes are technically called, but in his intercourse with young ladies hitherto it had been he, not they, who fixed the terms, and he had no idea of relinquishing this control of the position. When a week expired, therefore, without bringing an answer from Miss Woodbridge, he was disappointed, mortified and slightly stung: the last sensation goaded him not to sit down under defeat. Accordingly, at the end of ten days he wrote an ingenious letter on the text that silence gives consent, professing to have feared that Miss Woodbridge would resent his presumption and forbid him to write, winding up with a little gossip and a word or two of devotion. This, he thought, attacked her at so many points that it would certainly bring her out of her defences.

The letter arrived within Sylvia's fortnight of hope. She found it much harder not to answer this than the first. She had not thought of his writing as presumption, but as he put it in that light himself and thanked her for her indulgence, she tingled with a touch of anger and shame, and had a momentary impulse to enclose the two letters to him without a line; but she was loath to quarrel with him, and such a step could hardly fail to produce a breach. Then the last pages considerably mitigated the first. She was extremely disquieted, but did not fall into the snare, and maintained her silence with an additional effort.

She had other things to think about, which helped her to stand firm. There were private theatricals on foot, in which she was to take part, and everybody knows how much consideration and consultation they require. The play was to be the *Ladies' Battle*, that favorite choice of ambitious amateurs: Sylvia had been asked to play Léonie, because the pretty married woman who was getting it up, and had cast herself for the Countess, was jealous of the damsel who had acted with her before in the same piece, but could not very well drop her without an excellent excuse. Mrs. Lawton thought that the plea of civility to the young stranger was sufficient, and the *ingénue* was consoled by the principal part in the *Lovers' Quarrels*, which was to end the evening. Sylvia had acted with applause in B——, and was not aware, poor child! how little of an actress she was. She had two qualities in her favor—a good memory and composure: her looks carried off

the rest. The corps was divided upon her merits: the women did not think highly of her performance, but her face was so striking and peculiar when her eyes grew black with excitement, and her voice was so soft and deep, that the men were delighted. George March was not one of the actors, but as he was intimate with the set, he was often present at the rehearsals and filled the part of prompter or read the part of an absentee. His admiration for Sylvia, like that of other men, increased as he watched her changing expression, by turns shy and fearless—shy to excess in the sentimental passages, but brave to boldness elsewhere. He was impressed by the absence of coquetry in her manner, while her animation and enjoyment showed that she was not indifferent to the compliments which she received. He observed her with sceptical coolness and closeness to see whether she were not merely a better actress in real life than in genteel comedy, but could not detect a doubtful ring in her tones or gleam in her smile. He found her extremely interesting, and began to wonder whether she had ever been in love. His habitual guard over himself prevented this scrutiny being apparent, nor was Sylvia aware how much he managed to be near her on these occasions. George March detested the practice of engrossing a woman in public: he thought it in bad taste and silly. He disliked to see a man make himself conspicuous, and doubly disliked a woman's doing so; and when he saw a man put a girl into a position from which she could not escape except by a decided and disagreeable step, he felt a desire to kick him. Consequently, his own manner and conduct in society did not give much indication of his preferences: when he had been what is called "attentive" to a young lady, he had neither exposed her to remark nor had she been able to exhibit him in her train. He was not seen hovering about a woman when he had finished his dance, with her bouquet or fan in pawn as a pledge of her return. These are not very deep arts, and he was as capable of them as anybody else if he could have bent his rigid disposition; but he despised them, and doubted their efficacy. Solid advantages, however, he did not undervalue, and just then he was very glad that his former friendship for Miss Rushworth enabled him to continue his visits at the house on an informal footing. The library with its soft-coal fire and porcelain-shaded reading-lamp, and Mrs. Rushworth's delicate figure and face on the deep sofa, were associated with pleasant evenings: the picture was oftener before his mind's eye now that he had seen it once or twice with the light falling on the dark furry masses of Sylvia's hair than when it had gilded Lucy's blond puffs and rolls.

Philip King, having written three times to Miss Woodbridge without eliciting a response of any sort, was puzzled as to the meaning of her silence. He made up his mind that it could not be unfavorable, and came to a conclusion not far from the truth—namely, that she took too much pleasure in his letters to put a stop to them. These tactics, flattering as they were to his vanity, disconcerted his plans and heightened his desire to see her. His next step, therefore, was to ask her permission to come to A—— and see her, as she would not write to him, begging her to name a time when she would not be overrun with engagements. He considered this petition a happy thought, since if she acceded it gave him a certain claim upon her, while, whether granted or refused, it did not commit him.

The request threw Sylvia into a flutter of excitement: it gratified and touched her. He really must miss her, must long to see her, and she met his wish halfway. At the same time, she wished, above all things, to deal honestly: if she should bid him come, might it not seem like encouragement if—if— Then she called to mind her needless alarm on the receipt of his first letter—felt ashamed of her vanity and amused by her forebodings. She read the letter over, but could not discover that more was implied than that he missed her and wanted to see her, and she could say as much in return with truth. She sat alone in her

bedroom thinking about it until darkness came on. Then she struck a light and wrote a short, straightforward letter, saying that it would give her pleasure to see him in A——, as it had always done in B——; that just now she was rather busy rehearsing for private theatricals, but if he would come on for the play she thought he would enjoy it, and then she would be more at leisure. The play was not to be given for nearly a month, which was putting off the pleasure of seeing him for a long time; but this had the advantage of not seeming too eager: moreover, if he came then, he would see her in her becoming dress. She directed and closed the letter and left it lying on her table, meaning to post it herself next day: his she slipped into her pocket as she went down to dinner.

That evening George March happened to call upon her. In common with most men, he liked Mr. Rushworth and thought that his wife was too hard upon him. When she asked why they did not play *Trying it On* and give him the part Charles Mathews used to act so well, George did not smile: he had not seen his host fidgeting about the room, touching everything, for an hour previous.

"What is *Trying it On?*" asked Sylvia, innocently.

"The adventures of a male Meddlesome Matty," said her aunt.

Sylvia broke into a short laugh: Mr. Rushworth appealed to the younger man: "Did you ever hear anything like that, now? The way in which women stick to each other through every sort of wickedness passes belief. My dear fellow, never marry, or, if you do, take care that your wife hasn't a single female relation or friend."

"And no nieces by marriage," observed George March; and then everybody laughed at the uncle's slip. "Only men friends," he added, shaken in his *esprit de corps* by the sound of her mirth. The women laughed again, but Mr. Rushworth took no heed.

"As to their duplicity and deceit, nobody but a married man can have a notion of it, or of their cruelty. They've *got all the writers on* their side: Scott—

'O woman! in our hours of ease,'

and Tom Moore and Dickens and Thackeray, who says every true-hearted woman is a hypocrite."

"Just what you say yourself, Uncle Jem."

"Not in that sense, my pet."

"Every married woman is forced to tell stories," said his wife.

"To her husband, Mrs. Rushworth?" asked George March.

"No, for her husband."

"I'm very much obliged to you, my dear, I'm sure. I only wish you would sometimes spare me some of the disagreeable *truths* you are forced to tell *me:* I shouldn't mind a fib now and then so much."

Sylvia looked up so suddenly and intently that her uncle laughed: "There's a certain order of truths, Miss Silly, that wives only tell their husbands."

"Home-truths," suggested George March.

"Exactly—excellent!—which no man cares to hear."

"I know when some people say 'a true woman' they mean a story-teller; and I hate them."

"Do they use it as a term of reproach, Miss Woodbridge?" asked George in a bantering tone.

"No; that's the worst of it: they say it as if they couldn't praise a woman more than by saying she is what it would disgrace a man to be."

"But you are the most close-mouthed gypsy yourself that ever breathed. Here have I been trying for a month to find out some of your secrets, and you won't tell me one!"

"I don't know what that has to do with it, uncle. You know the proverb, 'Ask me no questions'—but I don't tell you anything."

"Oh, you're a jade: you and your aunt together are too much for me. I must go round to the club.—Come along, March."

"No, thank you, sir: I will stay and be deceived."

"You do like to keep your affairs to yourself, Sylvia," said Mrs. Rushworth after her husband had left the room, for

she had been struck by the young girl's uncommunicativeness.

"Yes, Aunt Lucy, but can't people trust you as well if you don't tell them everything?"

"Better, I think," said her aunt.

"I am not confidential, I know," said the young girl. "Somehow, I never believe in people who are so to me."

"Confidences generally stop where confidence begins," said George March.

"I don't know what I should do if anybody did not believe me—" began Sylvia simply, but looking up she met the young man's cloudy blue eyes like Labrador spar, ordinarily stern in expression, turned upon her so full of light that for a point of time they fixed her own: she was seized by an unaccountable agitation and shyness, and instinctively dropped her eyelids until the thick lashes almost closed. He, instantly becoming conscious of the intensity of his gaze, turned it away.

At this moment Mr. Rushworth, who had been prowling about in the next story, came down stairs and looked in, saying, "Come, George, come along, or the women will get the better of you."

The young man, in some inward perturbation, was glad of the chance to escape.

On going to her room that night Sylvia discovered that the permission she had accorded a few hours previous appeared in a different light. Her having allowed Mr. King to write was probably his reason for thinking that she would allow him to come, and it might end some day in his charging her with having led him on. She had all at once found out that her liking for him, and the mingled emotions which produce the satisfaction of a young girl in the society and attentions of a handsome, lively young fellow, were superficial feelings; that he was not necessary to her happiness; that she took pleasure and interest in the society of other young men; also, that this permission gave a different color to her concealment of his letters from her mother. So before going to bed she wrote another note, shorter than the first, to the intent that if he came to A—— he must not do so on her account, and that he must not write to her again, as she could not receive his letters. The effort which this letter cost made it colder and curter than if it had caused her none: she perceived, and was sorry for it, but had not the facility of pen which would have enabled her to amend it.

CHAPTER II.

THE dramatic corps found the weeks passing quickly, as they are apt to do when they lead up to an epoch which is expected with mingled pleasure and dread. When the actors remembered that but seven days remained before the night of the play, they experienced uncomfortable sensations—goose-flesh, dryness in the throat, weakness in the knees, hollowness in the stomach as if from fasting, irregular vibrations of the heart, as if it were swinging at the end of a cord: these and other symptoms were felt with greater or less acuteness in proportion to the nervous sensibility of the subject. Mrs. Lawton underwent so many trials in getting up these theatricals that she grew thin and pale, and began to fear that she should look her worst instead of her best on the momentous occasion. The company had almost worried her to death: the gentleman with an inimitable comic turn, who had already played De Grignan so cleverly, had announced long ago that a part of that sort was not in his line, sentimental rôles being what really suited him; and as the young man who had been cast for Charles would not change characters, the other rehearsed sulkily and without spirit. The people who had previously filled the minor parts declined to perform them again, saying that there could be no trouble about replacing them, as *anybody* could act those; so that the difficulty of getting actors clever enough for the principal personages was slight to that of finding specimens of Christian humility for supernumeraries. Through all this, and much more, Sylvia won golden opinions of those who were not too much taken up with themselves to observe anybody else. George March never missed a rehearsal, and, although of the worst stuff in the world for a carpet-knight, it was wonderful to see how useful he made himself, so that he came to be looked upon as one of the troupe. Nobody suspected what brought him there. He lost no opportunity of seeing Miss Woodbridge, though never seeming to seek one: she, on her side, had reached that stage in which if twenty-four hours pass without a meeting, it is a lost day. Since the evening when his searching glance had caused her to revoke her grace to Mr. King he had established an ascendency over her of which he himself did not dream. She had never before been anxious for any one's good opinion—she had never troubled herself about it: now she had a constant desire that he should think well of her. The attitude of looking up to a young man was novel to her, and she enjoyed it, as a woman generally does. His strength was not always pleasantly manifested, but she enjoyed that too—not with clinging and dependence, but with an exhilaration like that which she had sometimes felt in climbing a rugged hill or struggling with the surf. The harsh flavor of his character made the recollection of the men she had liked before insipid to her. The potency of mutual attraction in bringing two people together without premeditation or design is a well-known phenomenon. Sylvia never went a foot out of her way in order to meet George March, nor did he lie in wait for her and dog her steps; but they lived in hopes of meeting each other, and they met so constantly that she became embarrassed by it, and afraid he might fancy that she had come out on purpose. He fell into a habit of walking home with her from the church to which they both went, and this resulted in his coming in afterward for half an hour at the instance of Mr. Rushworth. The latter, looking his triggest, invariably took a long walk up and down the streets in which he would meet devout throngs in their best clothes returning from their places of worship, and came back to the early Sunday dinner with a

fuller budget of gossip than on week-days. George March had knowledge enough of Mr. Rushworth's indiscretion to be off before the latter returned, so that he took to twitting his niece on her failure to make a conquest of the young man.

"There's a man worth captivating, Miss Silly—a serious, solid fellow: none of your dandies and popinjays. But you are wasting your arts upon him, you see; so you had better smile on that good-looking young Lucas, who has been making sheep's eyes at you for ever so long."

"Oh, uncle, Mr. Lucas is not in the least attentive to me," Sylvia protested.

"Don't fancy you can hoodwink me," replied her acute uncle. "By the way, when are you going to pay me those three cents you owe me?"

"When you tell me what I owe them for," she said, laughing, glad to drop the other subject.

"I've told you already—for keeping your secret."

"But I have no secrets."

He nodded at her significantly with half-shut eyes: "Why doesn't the young gentleman in B—— write any more? Have you given him the number of the house?" Sylvia colored deeply. "If you haven't choked him off, why don't he come on here and look after you? The winter I was courting your aunt (a very much milder person she was then) I had to spend three months in New York on business: I used to come over by the afternoon train on Saturday (there were but three a day then, and it took four hours and a half), try to get a walk with her on Sunday, pay her an evening visit, and go back by the owl line, that only ran on Sunday nights then. I used to carry an odd sort of valise, and I found out afterward that the conductor took me for the mintdrop man coming over to be ready for the morning train. A—— was the candy-centre in those days."

On the Sunday before the play George March was prolonging his visit, while Sylvia described with pride the beauties of B——, where he had never been.

"You ought to see it."

"I should like to see it very much if you will show it to me." Sylvia was silent. "May I come and see you when you go home?"

"I shall be very glad," said the young girl, somewhat frigidly.

There was a moment's pause: then he said in a grave voice, "That is a permission I never asked of a young lady before, Miss Woodbridge."

Sylvia's heart was in her mouth, the thick eyelashes drooped, and she answered indistinctly, "And I never granted it before."

The door-bell rang: they rose simultaneously, and, not quite knowing what she did, she made a motion to shake hands with him for good-bye. He held her hand: she looked up and met the same look she had seen once before, which seemed to scan her thoughts as if she were glass. She could not withdraw her eyes, but the pupils dilated and the gaze widened, as if imploring him to let them go.

"You understand me?" he asked. She bowed mutely: he pressed her hand gently, released it, and was gone the next instant, passing out of the street-door as the servant opened it.

The two days which followed were the happiest either of them had ever known. On Monday he met her at a reception where he supposed that she would be, and managed to leave it when she did. It was one of those heavenly afternoons which winter borrows from Indian summer—as still and pensive as November, with a faint, unrecognized foretaste of the yet distant spring. As the lovers emerged into the street the sun was half an hour from setting; the chimneys and steeples were glowing against a sky of the softest blue; a bird was chirping on the bare branches of one of the trees before the house.

"Won't you take a walk?" he said. They turned into a wide street leading westward to a river, beyond which there were hazy heights and a purple avenue of trees, making a vista to the sinking sun. It was a favorite walk of the young people of A——, and they knew that they should meet with other couples, but they

did not care for solitude: their hearts were full of unspoken love which each divined. There was no constraint, and the happy consciousness made them laugh and chatter like children at play. She told him about her mother and sisters, of their summer journeys, and of the winter frolics which made the society of B—— almost like one large family. She was not a talkative girl, but her tongue was loosened that day as she tripped beside him, now and then casting up shy fleeting glances. She wore a pretty fawn-colored costume trimmed with velvet and fur, with a pheasant's wing in her hat, and reminded George March so much of an antelope and a squirrel that he was possessed by insane impulses to stroke and pat her. When he left her at her uncle's door he asked her to walk with him on the next afternoon. It was the first engagement of any sort he had made with her: they both thought of this, and it was like setting the seal to their tacit understanding. She colored violently, but agreed. Her courage and confidence touched him deeply: he had resolved not to address her formally until she should return home, and under the circumstances he was bound not to make love to her. Whether she penetrated his motives and intentions he could not be sure, but he perceived that while she was happy in their mute contract, she shrank from any avowal on his part, and he was grateful to her for trusting him. So they walked again on the morrow under a sky like May with hearts as light as their footsteps, and laughed and chatted nonsense as before, but her deep, soft voice had the sweet caressing ring of a child's accents, her gray eyes met his oftener and more frankly: his were as blue and tender as the day, and his smile was as open and glad as a boy's. There was a confession in every look which they exchanged, in every intonation of their slightest words, and they surrendered themselves to a pure delight which was new to them both. When they parted he went his way, marvelling how anything could be so dear to him as she had grown in two days—how every fibre of his heart had wrapped round her—how every motion of his mind took its impulse from this new-born passion.

As for Sylvia, she went to her room longing to see her elder sister and lay her head on Susan's shoulder; failing which she laid it on her pillow for a little while and shed a few blissful tears. She and George March were to meet again in some hours at the last rehearsal of the play, a dress-rehearsal, and after dinner Sylvia hastened up stairs to dress and display herself to her aunt. She was to wear white muslin, according to the traditions of the part; Mrs. Lawton had ordered it, and it was covered with frills and puffings exceedingly becoming and softening in their effect. A faint halo of happiness and love surrounded her and transfused her with a novel grace and gentleness. Her aunt, lying on the library-sofa, looked at her critically, and the new expression struck her at once: she fixed a look of keen scrutiny on her niece's face, and Sylvia fancied that she must see the whole story there, and blushed intensely.

Her aunt saw that there was a story, and asked herself, "Who can it be?" Wishing to cover the young girl's confusion, she said, "You ought to have some sort of ornament."

"My gold locket and chain?"

"No, that would be too heavy for the dress. Run up to my room and bring me a morocco case from my dressing-table."

On the stairs Sylvia passed her uncle hurrying down: "Not ready? You'll be late: we ought to be off."

"Come down here, James, and let her alone," called Mrs. Rushworth from the library.

"But she will be late," he said as he entered: "it's—"

"You can't go until the carriage comes," replied his wife indifferently, "and that will not be here for a quarter of an hour."

Sylvia reappeared with the box. It was her aunt's trinket-case, long ago despoiled of its principal treasures for Lucy, but among the old-fashioned brooches, hair-bracelets and other objects which the

young beauty had despised, was a beautiful triple string of pink coral.

"It was the first of that shade which I ever saw: my brother brought it to me from the Mediterranean fifteen years ago, when I had given up wearing such things. Lucy would not have it: she thought it did not go well with the color of her hair; which was a great mistake, but young ladies have their own notions on those subjects. It will do very well for you, and you must keep it."

"Oh, aunt! how beautiful! how kind! You're too good to me."

"Hear the fuss and see the kissing, but not one word to me for those three cents and keeping her counsel!" The door-bell rang. "There's the carriage: come quick, Sylvia. Here's your cloak."

"I heard no wheels," cried his wife, looking at the clock: but five minutes of the fifteen were gone. In another moment the parlor-maid, a new servant, without a word ushered in a tall young man in evening-dress, with dark eyes and moustache. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Rushworth knew him, and Sylvia was still kneeling before her aunt, who had just fastened the coral round her full white throat.

Without allowing a second's pause for the situation to become embarrassing the new-comer bowed and said, in an easy, self-assured manner: "I beg a thousand pardons if there is a mistake. I was shown up."

At the first sound of his voice Sylvia started to her feet and turned with an exclamation: "Mr. King!"

He came forward and held out his hand: "Pardon my glove, and pray introduce me to Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth, and let me apologize for my apparent intrusion. The maid would not take my card: she said she knew I was expected."

"But *you* knew you were *not* expected," said Sylvia, almost violently.

"So I said, but she would hear no explanation, and fairly drove me before her up stairs. Won't you introduce me to your aunt and uncle?"

"Mr. King, Mr. Philip King of B——," said Sylvia, turning to Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth, who had not recovered from their surprise at the stranger's appearance during this short scene. Mr. Rushworth shook hands with his usual warmth, his wife bowed with her usual coldness, but both asked the visitor to sit down.

"I am afraid you were going out: you must not let me detain you," he said affably.

"No, we couldn't," replied Sylvia, in the same abrupt manner.

Mr. Rushworth explained hastily, adding, "But you must go with us: Mrs. Lawton will be delighted to see you, and there's the carriage now."

"If you really think it would be no intrusion—"

"Bless you, man! no—quite the reverse. Charming little woman, great pet of mine; besides, as a friend of my niece's— I know your name very well," he concluded significantly. —"Come along, Silly."

Sylvia turned without a word. Philip King stood before her smiling, with teeth like ivory, bowing, self-possessed, and she wondered how even for an hour she could ever have thought him anything but odious. Her uncle, in putting on her white evening-cloak, slyly pinched her ear. Mr. King stopped a moment below for his overcoat, the street-door shut, and the carriage rolled off.

Mrs. Rushworth sharply rang a hand-bell which stood on the table beside her: "Bridget, how came you to bring that gentleman up here, instead of taking him into the parlor?"

"Sure, mum, I thought he was one of Miss Wudbridge's play-actin' young ginthlemin they was a-waitin' on."

"I told you only this morning never to show anybody up stairs without bringing their name or card first, did I not?"

"Yes, mum, ye did; and if you plaze ye'll jist suit yerself with another gurl, for I'll be afther lavin' whin me week's up. I've always lived in the finest famelies in the ould counthry, and here too, but, though ye don't live so stylish as many ladies, ye're intirely too pertickler."

Mr. Rushworth was in great glee. He had now, as he fancied, both ends of a string. He had no doubt that Philip

King's visit had been prearranged with Sylvia; he believed that she had expected him, and that King had said so to the maid: his quick, bird-witted mind instantly flew to wrong conclusions. He prided himself greatly on his tact in delicate matters, so, as they were passing the club, he put his head out of the window and called to the coachman to stop.

"What are you going to do, uncle?" exclaimed Sylvia in consternation.

"Smoke a cigar, and join you later," he replied, jumping out and banging the door. "You don't want me now: you've Mr. King to take care of you. Drive on —Mr. Lawton's;" and he unconsciously winked at the coachman, an intimation which was lost in the darkness.

As soon as they were alone Philip turned to Sylvia and held out his tightly-gloved hand.

"You are not angry with me?" he asked in an insinuating tone, yet full of assurance.

"You know I am—furious: I told you not to come."

"Ah! but first you said I might, and I acted upon that."

"What do you mean? I *never* said you might."

"Pardon me, but have you forgotten your first letter?"

"My first letter? There was only one, and I told you not to come, and not to write any more."

"Somebody has counterfeited your handwriting and style very ingeniously, then," replied the young man, coolly and with a touch of insolence, "since I have two letters in my pocket with the same date—one telling me that I might come, the other forbidding it. I was at a loss to know which you meant me to do, but," he went on, resuming his honeyed tones, "I hoped you had repented your cruelty on second thoughts; and after waiting weeks in my fear of offending you, I remembered that I was a free citizen and could go where I liked."

Sylvia was too much confounded to answer: she could not untangle her ideas, and they were at Mrs. Lawton's door. "There is some extraordinary mistake," she said in a low voice, half to herself: "I cannot understand." The door opened.

"When can I see you to-morrow? I am entitled to an explanation," he demanded angrily and arrogantly.

"Directly after lunch—two o'clock," was all that she had time to say.

She collected herself as she threw off her wrappings. There was a mystery: she was as sure she had destroyed her first letter as that she had posted the second, yet it was clear that Mr. King had got it; and in that case she had no right to resent his coming. He was entitled not only to an explanation, but to the same treatment as before she left home: she was bound to behave civilly to him. She did not succeed entirely, for she was so annoyed and mystified that it was impossible not to visit it upon him in some degree, and as she presented him to the lady of the house she said, "He arrived just as we were starting, and uncle *would* make me bring him."

Mr. King was not disconcerted, and met Mrs. Lawton's effusive cordiality with fluent apologies: they suited each other exactly, and began exchanging compliments and sallies while Sylvia joined a group of fellow-actors.

George March, with a lover's impatience, had arrived early, instead of dropping in among the latest, according to his wont. His last sight of Sylvia had been when she looked up into his face three hours before: he next saw her enter the room on the arm of a handsome, particularly well-dressed young man. In determining on his course toward her he had recognized how unfair it would be to monopolize her or mark her as the object of his attentions, and set people talking about them in any way: his asking for their second walk had been a weakness to which he did not mean to yield again until after a prudent interval. In society he wished to be especially careful of her. She, with a woman's greater indifference to appearances and consequences, expected another manner from that in which he had met her before, and, disturbed

as she was by King's arrival, she wanted him to be near her for the support and comfort of his presence and affection. Therefore, his not seeking her out at once seemed like avoidance, and made her wonder wildly if he knew anything about the two letters. George March was not in a perfectly agreeable frame of mind: he had heard of Philip King, and a man of his reputation is not one whom a lover enjoys seeing about his lady-love. But beyond that he had not a doubt or suspicion: he supposed that they were old friends, but that King's arrival was accidental. Accidental we know it was not, but it had been in a certain sense unpremeditated.

Philip King had received Sylvia's two letters on the same day, but not at the same hour. Mr. Rushworth, fidgeting about after his fashion, had gone into his niece's room to see whether she had left her window open or her gas lighted, and, the latter being the case, he perceived a letter on her table: with his invincible curiosity he took it up, read the address, and as it was closed he put a stamp upon it and dropped it into the post, gloating over the notion that he had found out her secret. Consequently, it reached King by the morning mail, and, commonplace as it was, he considered it a triumph for himself, and walked about all the morning with the air of a conqueror, building as many castles in the air as Alnaschar with his basket of crockery. Should he go on that night? Should he make her wait a week or two as a punishment for her coolness? Should he take his dark blue overcoat or his light drab one? It was an unpleasant fall from these rosy reveries when the afternoon mail brought him the second letter. As we have seen, the effort it had cost the writer made it more constrained than was natural. Philip King was too superficial to understand this, and it doubled the smart of his disappointment and mortification. He saw that it was the result of second thoughts, but could not account for Sylvia's making no reference to the first letter. At length he set it down as coquetry, his favorite solution of all the phenomena of feminine inconsistency, and made up his mind to have nothing to do with her thenceforth: she should learn that he was not a man to be trifled with. He was very angry for a week or two, but calmed down gradually, and curiosity began to get the upper hand: was there another man in the question? He had been much more occupied with Sylvia since the receipt of the two letters than before: the irritation was a stimulus. Meeting Miss Woodbridge one night at a ball, he asked for news of her sister, and heard of the private theatricals. "Another man, by Jove!" said he to himself, and imagined the whole story —rehearsals, love-scenes, flirtation in the most approved form: the next day he went on to A——.

His suspicions naturally fastened upon the young man who was to play Charles, and while crossing swords with his pretty hostess he was reconnoitring the field for his rival. Fortune favored him beyond all probability: Mrs. Lawton was beginning to wonder what had become of Mr. Lucas, usually so punctual, when a note was given to her at which she glanced and then uttered a cry of dismay. Everybody gathered round her. "Mr. Lucas has caught cold, and is too hoarse to speak: it has come on within an hour. He says his only chance of being able to act to-morrow is to stay at home and not speak a word. What *are* we to do?—Mr. March, will you read the part for us this evening? You have been so kind! But that won't help us to-morrow night, and a cold like this never got well in twenty-four hours."

"I shall be most happy to come to your assistance if I can be of any use," interposed Philip King before anybody could speak: "I once took the part."

"You angel!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawton. "Never tell me that you came from B—— by the afternoon train: you came right from heaven to help us."

Relief had come so suddenly and unexpectedly that only Mrs. Lawton had measured the magnitude of the calamity with which they were threatened, but everybody was delighted except Sylvia, who would have preferred that the play

should fall through rather than that she should have to act with Mr. King at this juncture. She requested to see Mr. Lucas's note, and sent him so many injunctions to nurse himself and get well in time that Philip King was confirmed in his surmise. He was uncertain, however, whether Sylvia's solicitude were real or affected, but in either case it was uncomplimentary to him. He came forward with a copy of the play in his hand, to which he occasionally referred, and went through the rehearsal with ease, spirit and an open admiration of Mrs. Lawton which made her act very differently from the way in which she had done to the self-occupied Mr. Lucas, who was faintly sweet upon Sylvia. The regular prompter was present, so that George March had leisure to watch the by-play. He too had been struck by the eagerness of Miss Woodbridge's inquiries for Lucas, and guessed at once that for some reason or other she did not wish to act with her handsome fellow-citizen; but when he saw the latter apparently much more taken up with Mrs. Lawton than with his legitimate stage-sweetheart he was puzzled, and his observation sharpened involuntarily. Mr. Rushworth came in when the rehearsal was at its height: he was immensely tickled by the unexpected turn of events, and told George March confidentially that if young Lucas should not get well for a week he did not think any of those present would break their hearts. His way of saying this jarred the young man unreasonably: as he was of no use, he slipped away before supper, much less happy than he had come thither, although declaring to himself that he was a fool for being uncomfortable.

The heavenly days of premature warmth and softness were succeeded, as they generally are, by a sudden change. It snowed half the night and the whole following morning, growing constantly colder: at noon the sun shone out, and it cleared into bracing winter weather. Several people passed that morning unpleasantly — young Lucas, whose voice had vanished, leaving a sharp point sticking in his throat, on which gargles, mustard-plasters, inhalers and atomizers had no effect; George March at his desk, wondering whether Miss Woodbridge's friend from B—— was sitting beside her on the sofa; and Sylvia herself. The mystery had been cleared up at breakfast, when Mr. Rushworth had said with infinite slyness that now he should apply to Mr. King for those three cents which he couldn't collect.

"What for? *Do* tell me?" his niece asked with so much vehemence that her uncle, who had enjoyed the joke long enough, answered, "A postage-stamp."

The truth flashed upon her: she asked no more questions, and he went off enjoying her discomfiture. Questions were needless: when, where, how he had got hold of the letter mattered not. She now recollected her vain search for it: she had not destroyed it, and it had gone to its address. She was overwhelmed with mortification when she reflected how contradictory and coquettish her sending the two opposite letters must have seemed. She tried to comfort herself by the thought that the explanation would soon be made and set everything right, but she had no genuine faith in such a result. She recognized with a sort of desperation that she and Philip King were no longer on the same footing as when she left B——, and that it was her having allowed him to write which had made the difference: he held a new attitude toward her. "But what of it? what of it?" she repeated again and again. "It is only disagreeable now, and when he finds that I didn't want him to come, and that I don't like him any more, it will be all right."

But when one is going to have a tooth out, does it quiet one's qualms and quakes to reflect that it will soon be over and then it will be all right? The operation was still to be undergone, and Sylvia felt by no means sure that would be the end of it. Her heart sank lower and lower as the morning wore away and the sun came out, putting to flight a ridiculously feeble hope that Mr. King would suppose she did not expect him in such bad weather. His morning had passed delightfully in a private rehearsal with Mrs. Lawton, which she had told him the night

before was indispensable for the scenes between the Countess and Charles. Afterward he lunched at the club, where Mr. Rushworth had put him up, mentioned how he had spent the morning, and inquired the way to Mr. Rushworth's, so that the men might know what he meant to do with his afternoon. The snow and sun gave him a new idea, and he presented himself at the door in a pretty little cutter to take Sylvia sleighing. This being according to the pleasant customs of B——, she had no notion that it was unusual in A—— or that inferences would be drawn from it; but he knew this, and was actuated by the knowledge.

Sylvia came forth in her furs, and he drove her into the Park, where others before them had beaten the snow down into a smooth, dazzling track, over which they flew round the circles and loops, in and out of the mazes, to and fro along the highways, meeting everybody in A—— who owned or could hire a sleigh. She opened at once with the history of the letters, hoping to dismiss the matter in a frank, off-hand way. But there were advantages for Mr. King in the position of affairs which he was the last man to neglect; and Sylvia, after making a bare statement, found herself trying to account for having bidden him come if she did not wish to see him, or if she did for having forbidden him, for not answering his letters since she had let him write: in short, she was involved in all the toils which the subtlety of man could weave out of the materials which she had unfortunately supplied. In the course of his cross-questioning King inevitably arrived at the conclusion that half her conduct was to be explained by preference for him—the rest by preference for somebody else; but the suddenness of a change which should cause her to write two contradictory letters within twelve hours he could not account for, unless somebody had proposed to her in the interval. Finding himself baffled, he grew angry and insolent, and at length asked point-blank, "Are you engaged?"

The audacity and unexpectedness of the question made her speechless for a moment, in which hesitation and agitation were evident: then she answered, "What business have you to ask?"

"Ah! then you are, or you would say no."

"No," she exclaimed, "I am not."

"I don't believe it, or you would have said so at once."

"You don't believe me?" she repeated in a tone which vibrated with anger and astonishment. "I never told an untruth in my life. Take me right home."

Fortunately, they were close to the cityward gate of the Park, and not far from her uncle's. Sylvia did not speak for the rest of the drive. The keen air and the excitement of the conversation had turned her cheeks crimson, and her dilated eyes shone like moons: her furs were lightly powdered with snow from the trees. The same causes had kindled her companion's cheeks and eyes: any one passing would have thought them a very happy couple.

Just before reaching the house they met George March coming up town: the sight took his breath away. Why had she not told him that she was going out with this fellow? He remembered immediately that the snow had not begun to fall when they left Mrs. Lawton's: still, she might have said something, given him some notion—something to set his mind at rest. He forgot that he had purposely avoided speaking to her apart. But what did it amount to? Here was a man from her own place, probably an old friend, perhaps a relation, who had come on to see her for a day or two—men do that without being in love with girls; the sleighing had come on, and she had gone with him—girls do that without being in love with men. He strove to be rational, but he found it impossible to be comfortable.

The evening made things worse. Mr. Lucas's lotions and potions had not cured him: he magnanimously sent to offer his dress, on which he had spent much time and thought, to his substitute, who, however, had already found something at a costumer's, and when he appeared in his close-fitting riding-coat, cords and tops, made a hit before he had uttered a

word. The young ladies in the audience were in a flutter at this gallant apparition instead of their every-day Mr. Lucas. Mrs. Lawton, brilliant despite previous anxieties, acted *con amore*. But her recruit was no longer absorbed in her: he played his part with provoking correctness, and was her devoted squire, but the humble, tender, ardent adorer of Léonie. He was a good actor, and the tension of the situation caused him to surpass himself. He looked into Sylvia's eyes, he pressed her hand, he made love to her passionately under cover of the play. Her agitation and distress were excessive: no man had ever made love to her at his own will before, and to be unable to stop or check it—that it should be entirely beyond her control and out of her hands—was distracting. Whatever nervousness she had felt at the idea of acting before strangers was forgotten: she repeated her part with mechanical accuracy, while the very emotions which were dividing her mind with her acting made her play only too well. Her tremor, her excitement, her nervous concentration, were apparent to everybody: the actors were astonished, the audience was delighted, everybody said how much better it was given than before. George March, who had no place behind the scenes, sat among the spectators, with his attention riveted upon the stage and the drama within a drama which was going forward there. Before the end of the first act he was convinced that King was no mere friend of Miss Woodbridge's, and his visit no mere ordinary attention. There was a victorious, vain-glorious undertone to his respectful love-making which caused George March to grind his teeth: Sylvia's agitation was obvious, and he was sure that she was suffering, but he could not hit upon a clue which satisfied him. If this coxcomb was tormenting her, he had a right to protect her; but if she wished for his protection she would appeal to him. Through his intense love for Sylvia, and the implicit trust in her which had inspired it, he began to feel the chill touch of his familiar, the devil of doubt: he bade it get behind him with indignation and scorn, but even when he turned his back he knew that it was creeping up to him again. He had to muster his entire self-control to maintain an impassive demeanor and respond to the smiles and whispers of the girls near him during the performance; but when the interval between the acts loosed the laughing tongues, for the first time since his boyhood he was absolutely unable to stand the strain, so he retreated to a doorway, whence he looked on. The torture increased to the end of the play: King's triumphant mien at the conclusion, though in conformity with his rôle, taxed him to the extent of his endurance. He had looked forward with half-amused annoyance to seeing Lucas—whom he set down as a flat—in the position, but this fellow— Was he an old lover or a new one? and whence came Sylvia's pallor and tremor? When it was over the actors joined the audience to see the afterpiece, in which none of them took part, and he endeavored to reach her, but Mrs. Lawton stopped a general movement by requesting everybody to keep the same seat until the end of the performance. When the curtain fell finally they all repaired to another room, but he only succeeded in penetrating the crowd which gathered about the actresses, congratulating and complimenting, in time to hear supper announced, and Mrs. Lawton bid Mr. King take his Léonie to get something to eat. March tried to get a glimpse of her face as she passed near him, but she was not tall enough for him to see her over the living screen which divided them: he did not offer to take anybody to supper, in order to give himself every chance of getting near Sylvia, but Mrs. Lawton, like an attentive hostess, seized upon him and presented him to a young cousin of hers from New York, to whose vivacious babble he was forced to listen for the next hour. When he was free at last, Sylvia was going down stairs on her uncle's arm: he was looking back and reiterating some invitation or other to various people, with injunctions not to be late. In the dressing-room he learned that Mr. Rushworth had asked the *corps dramatique* to a supper next evening, got

up impromptu "in honor of Mr. King." He snatched his hat and coat and made off at once to escape the comments which would follow this information.

Mr. Rushworth was hospitable as well as fond of society; his attendance on Sylvia at the balls and parties had rekindled in his empty soul the love of gayety; the private theatricals had been an event to him as well as to younger folks; and after the climax of the performance he was unable to subside immediately into the dulness of evenings at home, as he fancied, for he never spent an evening at home. So, persuaded, as usual when he wished to do anything to please himself, that he was doing it to please somebody else, he paralyzed his niece by asking King to give them the next evening, and inviting all the actors to meet him. There was no timely opportunity for remonstrance, and since she could not help herself, Sylvia did her best not to seem ungracious about a project of which her uncle spoke with satisfaction as something highly agreeable to her. She did not know how she should get through the next day, nor what she should say to Philip King when he came to see her: she was bursting with indignation at the ungenerous advantage he had taken of her in the play, yet she knew it would be useless to resent it in words, as he would profess that he had only been acting to the best of his ability. Her perplexities were temporarily relieved by a headache, which kept her in her room all day, so that when he called she was really unable to see him. Her uncle was almost thrown into a fever of fuss by the fear that she could not come down in the evening; and as his wife would not allow him to go up to Sylvia's room, he relieved himself at her expense, worrying her about the china, the silver, the glass, the cook, and everything connected with the entertainment, until he upset even her calmness. The arrangements for the party were perfect, for Mrs. Rushworth's ill-health never interfered with the household order; but if there had been an illusory idea of her receiving the guests, it was dispelled by her betaking herself to bed before dinner. Excitement carried off Sylvia's headache and helped her through the evening: her duties as hostess enabled her to escape private conversation with her obnoxious admirer, although she could not prevent his assuming the airs of a favored suitor. As he bade her good-night he inquired in a stage-whisper when he could see her the next day.

"Are you never going back to B——?" she asked aloud in reply.

"Yes, to-morrow night," he answered at a natural pitch, with a rasp of anger in his voice. "May I come to-morrow morning?"

She nodded impatiently, and turned to some one else, delighted with the speedy prospect of getting rid of him.

Philip King was an experienced flirt in a small field, but he had two defects which were sure to interfere with him on a more extended scale of conquest—vanity and ill-temper. Resistance and indifference irritated him, and he lost his head. Fortune had favored him signally to outward appearance in the present instance, but he owned to himself that to go home leaving matters as they stood between Miss Woodbridge and himself would be too like defeat. Her beauty and intractability had stirred him up to unwonted energy: he did not know yet exactly what he wished or intended, but on one point he was determined—not to go back without knowing whether he had a rival, who he was and how far he had her good graces.

He presented himself soon after eleven o'clock the morning after the supper, encountering Mr. Rushworth leaving the house later than usual. The good uncle ushered him up to the library, shouted for Sylvia, who was in her own room, and, meeting the maid-servant as he went down stairs again, enjoined upon her not to let anybody in while that gentleman stayed.

An hour had scarcely passed when George March rang the bell. He had resolved on having an interview with Miss Woodbridge to ascertain whether she wished him to intervene between her and her presumptuous visitor, and in the hope that the whole tangle might

be unravelled to him; but he let Thursday pass from a reluctance to call at the house before the supper-party, to which he was not invited. It was a long day for him, and he was condemned to listen to numerous versions of Miss Woodbridge's sleigh-ride and the play, with abundant commentary from the young men of the counting-house and others who dropped in during the day. He cut some of them short more sharply than they enjoyed, but he had no character for good-humor to lose with idlers. The next morning he found that he was merely wasting his time in trying to work with this affair unsettled; so as soon as twelve o'clock sounded the earliest possible visiting-hour, he brushed his hat, pulled a pair of gloves out of his pocket, and soon afterward rang Mr. Rushworth's bell, as has been said. The parlor-maid who had given warning came to the door: she had been in a sullen rage ever since her resignation had been so readily accepted. George asked for Miss Woodbridge.

"She's very pertickler engaged."

He hesitated a moment and then said, "Will you ask if she can see me?"

"Indade, and I won't, thin. Mr. Rushworth's just afther tellin' me to lave nobody in whilst her young ginthlemin's here, and I've had throuble enough all along of the same."

He stared at her, and then burst into a fit of laughter, and went down the steps: the woman, fancying with some truth that he was laughing at her, slammed the door and went back to the kitchen.

Fifteen minutes later the door shut again almost as loud: it was Philip King going away after being refused for the first time in his career. It had come about so unexpectedly that he was bewildered: he could only remember that he had grown angry, that Sylvia had grown angry, that she had looked lovely, that he had offered himself and been rejected. He felt as if he had fallen out of a second-story window, bruised and smarting in twenty different spots. Sylvia was the most original, provoking, attractive girl he had ever seen, and for the moment he was hotly in love with her. He was also enraged with her, and by no means pleased with himself for having given her the advantage. He went to his hotel and packed, trying to collect his thoughts and arrange his plans. He did not give her up: he had very little doubt that by the next day she would repent what she had done. She should have leisure to repent, and would probably return to B—— in a very different state of mind. But he did not feel so secure as before this novel and stunning experience, and as he regained his balance he determined to conduct his retreat in such wise that it would not have an air of flight or rout, and to leave a torpedo to explode under the fair one's feet if she should attempt to pursue her victory by boasting of it. He made his final arrangements at the hotel, and went to Mr. Rushworth's office.

"I'm off in an hour, sir, but I couldn't go without stopping to shake hands with you once more and to thank you for your politeness and hospitality. I am only afraid of having abused your good-nature by coming to your house so often at all times and seasons."

"Not at all, my dear fellow: we have been delighted to see you—shall be delighted to see you back again."

"You are too good, but you must let me say in self-defence that I would not have made so free of your house without Miss Sylvia's invitation to come on and see her," he went on in the pleasant, off-hand manner which had already taken with Mr. Rushworth, and pulling Sylvia's two unlucky notes from his pocket. "This is it—no, this one." He unfolded it and glanced over it. "So you see," he concluded, laughing as he put it back in the envelope and replaced them in his pocket, "I had my credentials."

"All right! all right! Come again as soon as you can: you won't wear out your welcome;" and after a few words more they parted. Mr. Rushworth's fingers had literally twitched to get hold of his niece's letter, but King had adroitly avoided showing it to him while appearing to think that he had done so. The little vexation at not having seen the document gave way to an impression

that he had seen it or as good as seen it. As he went up town he overtook George March walking more slowly than usual, for his trouble was weighing upon him like a material load. Mr. Rushworth walked with the younger man as far as their roads lay together, and in that time told him all that he knew—which generally meant a great deal more—and unwittingly made as much mischief as he could.

"I've just been saying good-bye to King. Fine fellow that—man of the world too: all the Kings of B—— are great society-men; so are most of the young men of B——, in fact. I'm very glad to have a little joke against that niece of mine, sly puss!" Then came the story of the correspondence and invitation, which last, according to Mr. Rushworth's present persuasion, he had seen himself. "How some people fall on their feet! What luck that King should have known that part, that particular part! for he might have known De Grignan's or the other man's, and it would have been of no use to anybody. Such luck for Mrs. Lawton too! Private theatricals are a great risk: something always goes wrong. I remember once when my brother-in-law was first lieutenant of the flag-ship on the West India station, one winter that I was in Havana: I didn't know he was to have the honor of the connection then. A couple of English men-of-war came in, and our commodore wanted to give a great party. There had been a great deal of gayety: he wished to have something quite out of the common run, and sent for Tom to talk it over. Everybody was tired of balls: there were three or four of the officers who were good actors, so they decided to have a play, and Tom took charge of it. They couldn't choose something simple and sensible, with plenty of fun in it: they picked out an old-fashioned, sentimental piece called *Ingomar*, full of rant—you know what sort of spoony, bombastic fellow a navy-officer is—perhaps you've seen it? No? It is about a barbarian prince who is civilized by love: now you can imagine the rest. There are some famous verses:

> Two souls, and but a single thought—
> Two hearts that beat as one.

She says them—Parthenia—when Ingomar asks, 'What is love?' Well, the only trouble was the female part: there was nobody in Havana up to it but the English consul's daughters, who were just bitter ugly. At last Tom thought of making some of the middies play the women, and gave Parthenia to a little chap of fourteen, whose voice had hardly begun to change—as pretty as a girl. Everybody was there—English admiral, governor-general and his lady, all the pretty Spanish girls. You know what that sort of thing is like—flags, bunting, band, and all the rest of it. Everything went on swimmingly until the crack scene. 'What *is* love?' says the Injun. Parthenia came forward to say the poetry, opened her mouth, and couldn't speak a word—struck with stage-fright all at once. The prompter was another middy, smarter than the devil—has drunk himself to death since, poor fellow!—and a regular Pickle; so he whispers, 'The boy stood on the burning deck.'—'The boy stood on the burning deck,' said poor Parthenia, and then stopped short, knowing that wasn't it.—'Eating potatoes by the peck,' said the prompter.—'Eating potatoes by the peck,' repeated Parthenia in a high squeak from deadly fright. All the English and Americans roared: the commodore thought it was a trick, and turned upon poor Tom: 'What the h— does this mean, sir?' Ha, ha, ha! Good-bye. Come and see us soon: we shall want cheering up, you know;" and with a confidential laugh he turned into his own street.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER Philip King's departure Sylvia found herself in better spirits than she had been since his arrival. As the tempest of anger and agitation subsided, her heart grew lighter, like a ship which has thrown its cargo overboard in a storm. The position he took about the letter which he knew had gone by mistake, the impertinent assurance of his manner, his assumption of right over her—right to question her, right to insist on her corresponding with him—had fired her pride: when he told her he loved her he had even tried to put his arm round her waist, and her exasperation had burned up the gentler feelings, the sympathy, soft compunction and tender remorse which a nice girl feels for a man whom she is forced to reject. She was on the defensive during the whole conversation: she had not time to feel sorry for him. When he left her it was with a sort of menace, at the recollection of which she blazed up anew. But he was gone: that was the great comfort—gone, defied and defeated. She was all impatience to see George March again: now that she could reflect more calmly and clearly, she saw the difficulty of his speaking to her on the nights of the rehearsal and play, and understood his not calling on Thursday. But she hoped for him in vain all the next afternoon and evening. Her uncle, noticing her silence, rallied her about expecting Philip King.

"He's gone, Silly: I saw the last of him this afternoon."

"I only hope *I* have seen the last of him!" she burst out.

Her uncle was astonished for a minute, and then charged her with trying to hide her true sentiments.

Her aunt watched her quietly, and observed her harassed expression. She had taken some old notes from the card-basket and was tearing them into strips and rolling them into lamp-lighters: twice the door-bell rang, and each time, although she did not turn her head, Mrs. Rushworth noticed that her fingers stopped rolling the paper and her face became intent until the closing door and retiring footsteps of the servant gave token that it was not a visitor. Soon after nine her uncle went out as usual, and Mrs. Rushworth went to her room.

Sylvia knew that it was too late to expect George March that night: she went on despondently with her occupation, but her thoughts seemed to breathe more freely from her being alone. She began to be aggrieved by her lover's keeping aloof: if there was anything which troubled him, which he could not understand, he should come and ask her about it: he was bound to believe in her under all circumstances and against all appearances. Little by little, however, she awoke to the indefinite position in which she and March stood toward each other: she considered herself pledged to him, but he had not said a word that bound himself. She could not even write and tell him to come and see her—that she had something to say to him—without making an unwarranted advance. She had been worried because her mother did not know of the one-sided correspondence into which Philip King had inveigled her; and here she was plighted to a man whose name they had never heard at home, and she could not tell them of it! A sense of unfair treatment, of resentment, took possession of her; but, although it in some degree dispelled her dejection, it did not make her less unhappy. She had begun to suspect that Philip King had been trifling with her in a manner that was almost insulting until he had been caught in his own trap: a hot pulsating flush spread over her from head to foot as it struck her that George March might not be in earnest either. But what she felt him to be rather than knew him to be, and the expression of his eyes when

they had last spoken together, came back to her, and she could not give place to such a thought: he must love her—he did; but he was angry with her, and he would not come near her. And what should she do? Although reserved, she was unused to secrecy and involvement: the few trials of her life which had been too heavy for her to bear alone she had carried to her sister Susan. She was not introspective: she took no comfort in analyzing and speculating about motives and feelings. She would have given one of her fingers to be able to talk to her sister that night. She went to the writing-table and began a letter; but soon found that vague confessions of unhappiness and entanglement gave her no relief, and would make her sister very anxious. Then she spoke of Mr. King, but could not bring herself to mention George March; so, after nearly filling her sheet, she slowly tore it up and twisted it into lamp-lighters: then, collecting all that she had made, she laid them in a bundle, slipped them into a vase on the mantelpiece and went to bed. For the first time she knew what a sleepless night meant, and how the weary hours lengthen as they spin out from midnight to dawn.

Sylvia was almost afraid to go driving with her aunt the next morning, lest George March should call while she was out: of his visit the day before she had not heard. He stopped in the afternoon on his way up town, and she came down to him in the prim, cheerless parlor, where she knew that they would not be interrupted at that hour. He had passed a frightful night and day. His habitual mistrust of mankind assailed him with double force: how could he doubt longer that she had deceived him? She was human and a woman. Yet his faith in her had been so absolute it seemed impossible that his instincts could have been at fault. Recalling her shy yet open gaze, her sort of wild-bird way, varying from gentleness to untamed resistance, he too was ready to swear that she cared for him; but if she loved him and had told him an untruth, he felt it in him to hate her. And what else could it all mean? He knew that Mr. Rushworth was a gossip and a careless talker, but how can any man say he has seen letters — within a few hours, too—if there is no truth in it? March was not in a frame of mind to distinguish between romancing and lying. After that he was inclined not to go near her, but he thought she was entitled to the chance of vindicating herself; and, more than all, it was imperatively necessary to his peace to see her and know where he stood.

He turned as she came into the room: they were both pale, and George discovered to his surprise and vexation that he was trembling. They scarcely touched each other's hands, and sat down at some distance apart. He began by a commonplace speech, but his voice was so unsteady that he felt it would be better to waste no words, but come to the point at once. "I have not seen you since the night of the play," he said.

"You did not see me then, in one sense," she replied, remembering how throughout the torment of that evening she had longed for him to come and speak to her.

"Oh yes, I saw you," he returned with an ironical inflection which made her tingle with anger. "Indeed, I wondered whether I had really ever seen you before: it was a 'revelation,' as they say when Janauschek plays an old part for the first time." He was aware that this was offensive, brutal, but he could not stop himself, and tried to carry it off with a laugh. "At any rate, I have not seen you since, and it seems like a very long time."

"I don't know who you consider to blame for that," she retorted, stung by the first part of his speech.

"Certainly not myself, Miss Woodbridge, as I called here yesterday morning and was told that you were — engaged." He could not bring himself to repeat the words.

A flood of crimson rushed over Sylvia's face, which he naturally misinterpreted: she said in a lower, softer voice, but with some embarrassment, "It was not by my orders, and this is the first I have heard of it."

"I believe I forgot to leave a card. But," he added abruptly, seeing her confusion, "can you say you would have been glad if I had got in?"

"No," she answered, angered into self-possession again.

There was a pause: then he said, "I know who was with you, and you must know what I infer."

"I don't indeed," she returned with a legitimate sense of injustice. "What can you infer from my having another morning-visitor besides yourself?" She uttered this with an unyielding tone and look, and there was something a little savage in her manner, which put March in mind of a pet kid he had not thought of for twenty years — a glossy little creature which would not let itself be touched or held, and which all his caresses and all his strength could not keep quiet. But he was too much troubled for the recollection to amuse him. This must be mere duplicity on her part: she was standing at bay from desperation, unless he would give them both a last chance. He rose and walked twice up and down the room, while she sat still with a heart swelling at his injustice and unkindness. He stopped before her, and fixed his eyes full upon her with the probing gaze which she dreaded: "Miss Woodbridge, do you remember in this room, not a week ago, giving me permission to come and see you in B——?"

"Yes," she said, with a throb of her heart.

"Do you remember telling me that you had never given anybody else a similar permission?"

"Yes," she replied again, chilled by apprehension.

"Will you repeat that now?" he asked in a low voice, with increasing intensity of look.

Poor Sylvia did not know what to answer: could he have heard of the letters, or had he guessed too near the truth, yet wrongly? But how could she explain? how could she tell a man who had never uttered a word of love to her that a single glance of his was the key to the enigma? She dropped her eyes. "Yes—*no—" she said, and stopped.*

"*Yes, no!* Which do you mean?"

"Yes and no."

"By—" he broke out, but checked himself in time, turning away for an instant. "Perhaps you do not count going from A—— to B—— equal to coming from B—— to A——." His voice was not loud, but very harsh. He came back, and, trying to control and steady himself, said in an unnaturally monotonous voice, "Miss Woodbridge, you must be conscious that you have given me no answer: this is no explanation."

He was asking for explanations too!

"What right have you to ask for one?" said Sylvia fiercely.

"What right?" March's eyes all at once blazed with such fire that Sylvia involuntarily shrank. "What right?" he cried again: then, checking himself, he rejoined, "Quite true: I have no right. Good-afternoon;" and, bowing with the utmost formality, he left the room.

Sylvia was almost frantic. Her pride and temper were in arms at his treatment, but she had no redress, no appeal. "He wants me to say everything, when he has not said a word."

She saw that he was honestly mistaken, but felt that error may have as keen an edge as truth, and cut as sharply. It was cutting both ways, she knew, but there was no help for it: he thought she had deceived him, and all was over between them. "He will never come back: we shall meet as if we were strangers. I cannot bear it: I must go home. But there will be that hateful Philip King, who said I would be sorry yet."

She had the courage to go to dinner, but, being unable to hide that something was wrong, thought it best to say that she did not feel well. Her uncle at once began to fidget: the doctor must be sent for. Sylvia objected, but to no purpose. As soon as dinner was over he went off. She sat silently in the library beside her aunt's sofa. Her embroidery hurt her head and eyes: she tried twisting up lamp-lighters, but presently threw them back into the basket and rested her forehead on the arm of her aunt's sofa. Her heart was breaking at the thought that all was over, but the intolerable part of

it was that she had lost his respect. Mrs. Rushworth, who had not spoken, lay watching her with concern: she gently smoothed Sylvia's hair: "What is it, dear? Are you ill?"

"No," replied the girl, "but I want to go home! I want to go home!" and she burst into a paroxysm of sobs.

"So you shall if you wish," said her aunt in a soothing voice. "And I hope you will be happier there."

"Oh no, I shall not; and you must think me so ungrateful!" Her sobbing was violent. Mrs. Rushworth got up, rang, gave some orders, led Sylvia to her room and put her to bed: then she sat beside her, not vexing her by speech or any demonstration, but calming her by her presence. When the doctor came he pronounced it a nervous attack, opined that the private theatricals might have been too much for her, prescribed valerian and quiet, and went off to the club with Mr. Rushworth.

Breakfast on Sunday was always an hour later than on other mornings, for, although Mr. Rushworth seldom went down town on week-days earlier than he went to church, the old business-habit of an early breakfast remained. At half-past nine o'clock on this particular Sabbath there were breakfast and the master of the house, but no one else.

"Sylvia! Sylvia!" he shouted in his thin, tenor tones from the foot of the stairs. "How are you to-day? If you are going to church, you had better make haste and come to breakfast, or we shall be too late." Sylvia's lateness was a permanent delusion of her uncle's.

Mrs. Rushworth, paler than usual, appeared in her wrapper at the head of the first flight of stairs and held up her finger: "Do be quiet: I have told her to lie in bed until the middle of the day."

Mr. Rushworth, alarmed, ran up to her two steps at a time: "Is she worse?"

"No, but she has had no sleep for two nights, and the nervous attack has left her rather weak. She seems disposed to sleep now, so I have told her to lie still."

"So you've been up all night?" said her husband testily: "you might have had more consideration for me, when you know I sleep so lightly: I knew I had been disturbed. You will be ill: all this comes of having somebody else's daughter in the house. I knew how it would be, and I told you so: I was opposed to it from the first."

Mrs. Rushworth, not troubling herself to reply, had gone back to her own bed.

Her husband followed her into the room: "What's the matter with her, Lucy? Not slept for two nights? She can't be pining after that good-looking young fellow, for I am sure they arranged everything satisfactorily on Friday, if they hadn't before."

"You don't know what you are talking about," replied his wife. "My belief is that Sylvia has refused that man. She is a little tired and overwrought: you heard what the doctor said. I don't think theatricals the best thing for young girls, either. Now go away, please."

"I'll open your shutters, or you'll never know what o'clock it is."

"Pray let the shutters alone and go to your breakfast, or you will not be at church in time to help Mr. Wilmot on with his surplice;" with which harmless taunt she turned on her pillow and closed her eyes.

Her husband went down stairs, and, having finished his breakfast, found that he had time for a cigar. He went into the library, where the fire was already kindled, took an allumette to light his cigar, and, according to a long-standing habit, slowly unrolled it first to see what was written upon it. He recognized Sylvia's small, unformed handwriting, and read a broken column as follows:

"st Susy,
so unhap
horrid Ph
persecution
wish for you
annot tell
Never befo
all alone
at home
Don't breathe
hate myste"

For the first time since Mr. Rushworth had formed this incredible practice he

was rewarded for his pains. He eagerly drew out the remaining lamp-lighters and began to fit the strips: he had succeeded in finding the date and remainder of that page when he thought he heard his wife's door open, and he jerked them all into the fire together. It was a false alarm, but the strips of paper were in a blaze. He struck a match, and if he did not literally put poor Sylvia's incoherent confidences into his pipe and smoke them, they added to the flavor of his cigar and distracted his mind from his devotions. Coming out of church, he waited for George March from mere gregariousness and desire to gossip.

"Fine day for a walk: snow quite gone. Who'd believe there was sleighing three days ago? By the way, I wonder whether my niece did not take cold on Wednesday, and that's what's the matter now?"

"Is anything the matter?"

"Not much, the doctor says, though her aunt and I were up with her all night: he called it nervous—she seemed rather hysterical. But doctors are not always right, you know, and the sleigh-ride may have done it—such a sudden change of weather, you recollect. I dare say she was not well wrapped up after the play, either: girls are so imprudent! Then something has worried her—some row with that young King. I thought my wife was too clever by half when she said they were engaged: *now* she says Sylvia refused him, but I don't know about that—women are given to thinking that. Be that as it may, however, I have reason to know that he has worried her. Have you heard how Lucas is? Won't take a walk? Well, good-bye."

George March, although disturbed and distressed, was not altogether unhappy at the news of Sylvia's indisposition. For hours after leaving her the day before he had been in a storm of anger, jealousy, disappointment, disgust, and cruel pain. This was the only woman he had ever trusted, and she was completely false: how perfidiously she had taken advantage of his generosity and delicacy in not binding her or trying to gain one avowal from her! She was an adept. He was furious with her, and contemptuous for himself. He was lashed by passion too sharply to be conscious of the excess of his grief at losing her, yet at intervals the fever momentarily sank into a sick sensation which made him giddy; and all the while there was a voice in his soul crying out faintly that she was true. He was too young to be perfectly just, but with all his cynicism it was one of the endeavors of his life to be so, and the constant effort was of help to him. He thought over his acquaintance with Sylvia, and retraced it almost day by day until the evening when she had said so simply that she should not know what to do if anybody disbelieved her. But, true or false, how had she dared to say that he had no right to an explanation? Yet gradually it dawned upon him that he had none; in not binding her he had not bound himself; if he had asked no promises, neither had he given any. He came little by little to see her position from her point of view, and could not but acknowledge that everything looked differently.

One does not get over a rage instantly, even when the cause is withdrawn, any more than the sea subsides the minute the wind drops; besides, there was still a great deal which he could not understand, and which it tortured him to think of. But he went to church in an altered mood, and was startled not to see her in her pew. His lingering resentment began to ebb gently under anxiety: the thought of Sylvia ill and suffering softened him more than his best efforts to be just had done, and at the same time revived his hopes.

Sylvia slept at intervals through the morning, lying melancholy and inert between her slumbers, exhausted by the tension of the week and its recent climax and snap. In the half-conscious condition between sleep and waking she fancied herself in church, much too early as usual, and heard the continuous tread, rustle, murmur, opening and shutting of pew-doors, turning of prayer-book leaves; then a step she had learned to know—a firm, even step, not very quick or light—to which her heart kept exact time,

beat for beat, as it came up the aisle; then she saw a robust figure, a compact head covered with close brown locks, clipped too close to curl; then the glimpse of a tanned cheek and short, full chin under a heavy brown moustache, all expressing strength and force. What rude, hard strength it had been to her! He had been violent, cruel, yet she loved him with her whole heart. She thought of last Sunday, and the tears slid between her closed eyelids: only a week ago, and the seven days had been longer than any seven years of her life. Yet how much happier any moment of them had been, even on that dreadful evening of the play, even on Friday when he did not come, than now when all was over! The thought that life was before her overwhelmed her with discouragement: she was only at the beginning, and had the whole weary way to go. She trusted that in time she should not feel as unhappy as she did now, but she knew that even after many long years she could never be happy again as she had been before this terrible week, this fatal winter. The prospect was so depressing that she felt it would be a relief to begin moving along the blank road; so she got up, dressed and went to her aunt's room, full of remorse at having kept her up all night, which she had learned from the maid who brought her a cup of tea.

Mrs. Rushworth had not much experience in storms of the heart. When a very young girl she had been engaged to a young man, a lieutenant in the navy, a great friend of her sailor brother's, and he had died of yellow fever on a long cruise. It had seemed to her, and at last to her friends, as if she would never marry; but six years afterward, after refusing James Rushworth several times, she had honestly fallen in love with him and married him. In course of time she had got honestly over it, as wives sometimes do. This was her whole story. Her daughter Lucy had been a belle and a flirt, but when her volatile heart was finally captured the course of her love had run smooth. Mrs. Rushworth, in place of experience, however, had tact and that curious power of connecting events, causes and effects which belongs to some women. She divined that there was an attachment between George March and her niece, and that the unwelcome visitor from B—— had come between them: further than this she could not go, and the sleigh-ride and visits late and early had puzzled her. But she had entire belief in her niece's singleness of mind and heart, and waited for her confidence. Some of the strange magnetic tranquillity which invalids occasionally possess communicated itself to her niece, and restored her nerves to their proper pitch.

On Monday, Sylvia rose to a new day, feeling, as many a girl has done before, that the whole universe had changed for her, and that she must change her life to suit the altered world. She had made up her mind to fill existence as full of duty as possible, and began by anticipating her uncle's shouts to come to breakfast. Then she persuaded her aunt to let her look for a parlor-maid in place of the departing Bridget, and took the most promising advertisements in the morning paper. Her aunt guessed her state of mind, and let her go.

She had a very disagreeable morning, but came home successful, and feeling better for her walk. Then came the daily drive with her aunt: then she took the carriage and made a round of card-leaving. But she overdid the attempt, as young people will do, and as she sat alone in the library between dusk and dinner-time felt very tired and heavy-hearted, and as if nothing could be of help or use.

There was a ring at the street-door. Her heart began beating violently without the least reasonable cause, but it was right: there was the voice, the step, a few seconds' delay, and then Mr. March's card. Sylvia went down to the parlor.

The maid was lighting the gas, and until she left the room neither of them spoke. Then George March closed the door, and coming up to where Sylvia stood, said in a husky voice, "Will you not sit down? I have something to say."

She sat down without speaking.

"Miss Woodbridge, you were right on Saturday when you said that I had no

right to an explanation of what I could not understand in your conduct. I have come to beg your pardon for demanding it. I had no right — no excuse. Yes, some excuse perhaps, but no justification. Will you forgive me?"

She made an inarticulate sound and held out her hand, which he pressed and let go. "But I have not done," he went on, his voice growing less and less clear. "I went to B—— last night, and this morning I saw your mother." Sylvia started and looked at him with dilating eyes. "I told her that I love you, and asked her permission to say so to you. Now I have come to tell you, but only for this, that I may have the privilege of serving you. My offer does give me that, I think. I believe that somebody is annoying you. Mr. King has letters of yours: shall I get them from him? You shall have them by this time to-morrow if you wish, and then—you may send me away."

There was a moment's silence; then she got up and threw herself on his breast: "I do not want them: he may show them to the whole world."

II.

THE FALSE PRINCE.

CHAPTER I.

CERTAIN women set themselves up as beauties with a determination which nobody can resist. They establish their title, and wear it triumphantly, despite the cavils of prettier women who have been unable to obtain the general suffrage, and the demurrers of the men who dispute their claims. Some men do the same thing with equal success, and one of these was Valentine Germaine. He was of a good height, tall, but not too tall; his features had that negative regularity which, without displaying a single fine line, cannot possibly be called ugly; so that, if he had little on which to found the reputation of an Adonis, there was no actual impediment to his pretensions. A long, smooth, hempen moustache, hair of the same shade carefully brushed and parted in the middle, finger-nails polished and pared to a point, and the best tailor, bootmaker and hatter in the country, did the rest. Valentine owned to himself that Nature had been kind to him about his coloring: with a dark moustache he felt he should have made no headway. His complexion was a little pasty; he had a smooth, pale forehead, which he ranked among his advantages; large, light, somewhat fishy eyes, whose fixed gaze was in keeping with a slight stiffness of bearing, intended for repose of manner. He was made of material which takes varnish easily, and shows it to advantage. He was the son of an honest man who lived in Minniskunk, a town on the western border of one of the Middle States, and who had invented a very good sort of biscuit called the "skipper biscuit," the production of which brought him in a comfortable income. He died when Valentine was twenty-one, by which the latter came into possession of fifteen hundred dollars a year: he at once declared that he would not be a burden to his mother, and moved to lodgings, to begin a separation from his family which he intended to increase as time went on. His elder brother, who was in the biscuit business, stayed at home and carried it on in his own behalf and his mother's and little sister's, in order that they might not be obliged to leave the house which his father had built or alter their quiet but liberal mode of living.

Valentine had graduated at the so-called university of the place, where he had made the acquaintance of a couple of New Yorkers sent there to be educated out of harm's way, as it was hoped. From this intimacy, which dropped entirely on their leaving college, he derived the views which decided his future. He was studying civil engineering at the time of his father's death, but gave it up forthwith, and devoted himself temporarily to the only occupation for which he had the smallest ability—turning over money. For five years he lived upon five hundred dollars, using his thousand in speculating in railroads and watching the stock-market: by the end of this time, having been very prudent and very lucky, he had doubled his capital. He chose a propitious moment for "realizing," and removed to a distant city, where he did not know a human being. After looking about him for a few days, he took rooms in a building over the principal restaurant of X——, in which a number of young men of good position had a sort of mess. The upper part of the house was laid out in flats occupied by small families, with a few suites of bachelor apartments, one of which he was able to secure. His first care was to find out the tradesmen patronized by the set of young men just mentioned—his next for his financial concerns and to find safe investments for his small fortune: then he gave his mind to the regulation of his conduct toward achieving the end he had in view. He took his meals at a small table by himself, reading the New York papers at breakfast, the

English ones at dinner, and smoking the best cigars afterward. He dressed very well, went down town in the morning to look after his interests, walked about in the afternoon because he had nothing to do, and for the same reason went to the theatre or opera in the evening. He spoke to nobody, looked at nobody; so by and by the young men's natural curiosity and gregariousness impelled them to speak to him. He received their advances with a rather solemn suavity, yet not in such a manner as to cause them to set him down as offish. But while he did not speak or look, he saw and heard, and gained a great deal of useful information. It did not take him long to discover that the cock of the walk was a fine-looking young fellow, George Wilkyns by name, who was living in that house because his family were in Europe.

One morning he got possession of the bathroom of his floor at the hour when Wilkyns usually took his cold plunge, and at dinner-time made him a very handsome apology for it.

"Don't say a word, my dear fellow. My watch stopped and I was late, but no man who takes a bath every morning need ask my pardon for anything."

To which Valentine replied by a smile of intelligence, by which he at once put himself on the level of his new aquaintance.

Thus before a fortnight was over he was on easy terms with the whole set, who asked him to dine at their table. Shortly afterward Dick Allen offered to put him up at their club—*the* club—to which Valentine responded amiably, but not heartily, that he was a little tired of club-life, but that if he could be invited for a month he would see; which caused the others, who had thought Allen precipitate, to vote solidly in his favor at the end of the month, and Germaine was elected. The next step was an invitation to a ball at Mrs. Jack Wilkyns's, George's sister-in-law. The usual stages of progress in a new society followed, and by the end of three months he was fairly started on the career which he had traced *for himself*, and with the best possible *sponsors. The latter* answered the inquiries which were made about Germaine with the customary generosity of young men who are "putting through" a fellow whom they have taken up, whether they know anything about him or not. Valentine had said that he was of a West Indian family—which was remotely true—and that X—— suited his health—which was absolutely so, but then it had been perfectly good when he came there. He was not communicative about himself, although he had no air of concealment; so that when somebody asked who he was, and somebody else answered that he was a rich West Indian who had come to live at X—— on account of the climate, both thought that they knew everything about him. One day somebody remarked that Germaine was the earl of Fitzjermyn's family-name; after which inquirers were informed of this fact also, whereby it soon came to be stated that Valentine belonged to a younger branch of that noble house. He was not uneducated, as has been mentioned, but he was entirely without reading or information, and had not a single accomplishment beyond playing a good game of billiards, which he did every day—for exercise, as he said. Of dancing, riding, driving, even cards, he always spoke with a cold smile, as among the follies which a man soon outlives: he disposed of all dissipation on the same score; and in truth he had tried it in the brutal simplicity in which it was to be had in Miniskunk, and found that he had no taste for it: besides, in X—— it was expensive. The effect upon the young men of his quiet tone of disillusion was to impress them with the amount of living he must have done for a man of his age. Nevertheless, it was not wise to appear indifferent to too many things: foreign politics were easy to read about—even to talk about for one who talked so little—so he chose them as his favorite topic, and it seemed the most natural one for a man who had been so much about the world.

Thus Germaine began in X——, and by the end of five years he was as much at home as if he had been born and bred there. A man of leisure, if he takes care not to bestow too much of it upon others,

has a great advantage in our busy communities: it marks him as one apart. Women are gratified by his presence at their receptions and kettledrums; he is able to pay them visits at hours when they are alone, with time hanging heavy on their hands; such visits are apt to have an interest and charm for the fair sex for which they cannot altogether account—which bestow a fictitious value upon the visitor and lend some excitement to his next appearance if it be neither too soon nor too long afterward. Men who are trying to get up a yachting- or shooting-excursion are glad of somebody who is neither a bore nor a blackguard on whom they can count to make up the party; so that Germaine went frequently, yet the others always felt obliged to him somehow, and called him good-natured for going. In this way he met men from other places, and was asked to their ducking-clubs and shooting-boxes: he was a fair shot himself, having practised early and late on meadow-larks and fly-up-the-creeks on long summer-day trudges with his brother when they were boys; but he spoke of shooting too as one of the things which he had given up.

In the course of these years he came to be a referee in questions of etiquette which arose at the club or about subscription-balls and *fêtes champêtres:* the young men had appealed to him from the first in these matters, as if he must be an authority, but for a long time he declined, as a stranger, giving his opinion on such delicate points, until, by listening to the discussions, and hearing what men from other places said in the everlasting talking over cases of putting up, blackballing, dropping, etc., he formed sufficiently correct notions of the code, and when he gave his verdict it generally coincided with that already expressed by George Wilkyns or some equally safe person. He had, moreover, naturally, considerable social tact, and was too cautious to make mistakes.

When Germaine was thirty-one or two a piece of unexpected good luck befel him. The only real estate which his father had owned besides his bakery was the house in which the family lived, paying Valentine a small rent for his interest in it. It stood in the outskirts of the town, with an acre of ground and some trees about it. Now an enterprising brewer wanted it for a summer beer-garden. Robert Germaine, the elder brother, who had a head for business, drove a hard bargain for it. The mother mourned and wept a little at leaving it, although they had gradually become built in by a low German population; but Robert had made many sacrifices for her, and she said that it was her turn. He had had a struggle at first to keep the business going without his father's experience and with the depleted capital, but for several years past they had done very well. He at once put his share of the purchase-money into the bakery, and his mother and sister did the same with theirs. His first act was to offer himself to a pretty girl to whom he had long been attached, and whom he could now marry without prejudice to the interests or comfort of his mother and sister. He had been disgusted by Valentine's course after their father's death, but the management by which he had trebled his small property in ten years—for the speculations and investments had been going on—commanded Robert's respect. He had long wished to establish a branch of the business in one of the principal cities, and by selling their biscuits themselves to the trade pocket the profits which now went to middlemen; but hitherto he had not seen his way to it. He made a journey to X—— with the object of proposing to Valentine to put some of his money into the venture as the head of a house at X——, becoming a partner of the firm with equal profits in the whole business—a very liberal offer, considering all the circumstances. It was the first time since Valentine had left home, six years before, that he had seen a member of his own family or anybody whom he had previously known. Robert had grown stouter, redder and a little bald. Valentine, without having changed in any particular, was transformed: the alteration in his general appearance was so great that his brother would have passed

him in the street without recognition, yet it had been so gradual that his friends in X—— had not been aware of it: they sometimes said that he had improved, but could not tell in what particular. He was by no means enchanted by Robert's unexpected visit, but received him decently: he gave him an elaborate dinner at an hour when none of the usual set were at the restaurant, and when Robert proposed that they should walk about and see the town, Valentine had provided against the emergency by a trotting-wagon and pair of horses, in which he drove his brother through the deserted park and about the environs. He broke an engagement in the evening to take him to the theatre, in order to secure himself against Robert's undesirable habit of making acquaintance and exchanging a certain amount of personal information: he walked round to the hotel and smoked a cigar with him afterward while Robert packed his bag to be ready for an early start the next morning; and on the latter's praising the weed, the like of which he had never inhaled before, Valentine generously emptied his cigar-case into his brother's hat. Needless to say, he declined the business proposals, and urged strongly, but with tact, the advantages of Cincinnati or St. Louis over X—— for establishing a branch house: he had the relief of hearing Robert say that they could not undertake it anywhere unless Valentine would enter into the scheme.

The elder brother departed the next day, conscious that he had no just cause of complaint. He had been impressed in spite of himself by his younger brother—by the elegance of his dress and air, the handsome suite of rooms which he occupied, the *recherché* dinner, the many fine houses which he had pointed out as belonging to friends of his, the style of a party of ladies who had smiled and nodded to him with gracious familiarity in coming out of the theatre. These things belonged to a mode of life which Robert perceived to be beyond anything that existed in his own town, even in those higher circles amid which he was aware that his family did not move. He could not entirely withstand the effect of all this upon himself, yet there was a grain of dissatisfaction from which he suffered all day at X—— with a moral sensation akin to the small obdurate lump of dyspepsia: it increased steadily during his eighteen hours' journey, during which he thought more about Valentine than about his sweetheart, until, on getting out of the train in the middle of the night, he dismissed him for "a d——d conceited, cold-hearted upster, as he always was."

Valentine, on his side, had experienced an unpleasant shock, but he consoled himself by the reflection that there was less chance than before of Robert's dropping upon him, and congratulated himself on having escaped so well. On the whole, he was in a high state of satisfaction. By this windfall his income was considerably raised—was enough, indeed, for his purposes present and future, though he remembered that at his mother's death he would have something more. He had contrived with adroitness, and without downright lying, to give the impression of being much better off than he was. He knew that the modesty of his stock-operations, and even the state of his bank-account, could not be kept secret from the inquisitive; so that on the rare occasions on which he alluded to his affairs he intimated that part of his property was invested elsewhere, and that he only speculated for amusement. Now he resolved to speculate no more: he had been prudent and far-sighted, but he had also had an extraordinary run of luck, for he had never lost a dollar. He could not expect that his vein would never change, and as he was not remarkable for nerve, he made up his mind to run no more risks. But he wished to change his mode of life, or, rather, to expand it. His apartment was furnished luxuriously, and not in worse taste than most gentlemen's houses were ten years ago; but Sir Charles Eastlake had begun to shed his rays into our inner darkness, and for some time past Germaine, having got the cue, had taken to growling gently about atrocious forms and combinations of color. He gave up

his suite of rooms and took a whole flat in the same building, stating that he would furnish it faultlessly if the thing could be done in this country. He was conscious, however, that he had no knowledge which would enable him to fit it up for himself, and there was no Marcotte in X——. After due deliberation he applied to the lady to whom of late his afternoon visits had been most frequently paid, Mrs. Jack Wilkyns, his first female acquaintance in X——. She had gone to Europe about six months after his arrival, and had returned only a year before Valentine's accession of fortune. Having forgotten his existence, she was surprised by his coming to meet her, with George Wilkyns, as an old friend: the latter had been intimate with Germaine so long that he forgot how slightly his brother and sister-in-law had known him. She was one of those people who never forget a face, and she recognized him from the window of the train, recalling at the same time the little she knew of him. She was astonished when she found that he was there to meet her, but, seeing him well dressed and good-looking beyond her recollection, was not displeased, and responded to the deferential joy of his greeting with frank friendliness. She had been pretty enough when she went away, but nothing more: she had grown strikingly handsome, as some women do at thirty—had an inexhaustible supply of French clothes, a slight tendency to be fast and a secret desire to dash. Her husband's fortune, position and disposition favored this inclination, and her return after a long absence gave her a start. She had lived in the American society in Paris and Florence, and been to a few great routs in London and Rome on invitations obtained through the American legation. Nevertheless, this was more of the world than she had seen in her life before, and driving in the Prater, the Cascine, the Villa Borghese, the Bois de Boulogne and Hyde Park, and shopping in all the capitals of Europe, do enlarge and multiply the ideas in an unaccountable way, and make ordinary men and women more lively in conversation. Of art she knew no more than when she left home, but she was distracted about interior decoration—had brought back carpets, curtains, cases of furniture and some beautiful bronzes and china, which made her house the handsomest in X——. To this lady Germaine had been very attentive for the last twelvemonth, finding her a most agreeable addition to his life, and making himself exceedingly acceptable to her. They now took the ground of being very old friends—he tacitly rather than by assertion; she with gay audacity. Her husband was puzzled at first to fix the date of this intimacy, but he did not trouble himself much about his wife's doings, knowing her to be sufficiently discreet, and ended, like other people, by taking everything for granted.

To Mrs. Wilkyns, therefore, Germaine had recourse for help to furnish his rooms. "You know you have always let me come to you when I am in trouble," he said, looking at her sentimentally as he sat holding his hat correctly in one hand and stroking his light moustache with the other.

"I hope you will never have worse trouble than this," she replied, laughing.

"I shall never have trouble in which you cannot help me."

"Then you never expect more than this, I suppose?"

"The only real trouble I could have would come from you;" this in a lower tone, leaning a little nearer to her: he was very near already.

"Then you're all right," she answered, laughing again, and coloring. "When shall we set about our furnishing? We must begin with carpets and paper, or will you paint your walls?"

It may be imagined that the discussions, consultations and expeditions to which this undertaking gave rise were many and long. George Wilkyns was sometimes called in as umpire, since a lady's opinion could not be infallible in furnishing a bachelor's abode. Drives and walks were unavoidable, as well as appointments at shops, and even occasionally at Germaine's rooms. This lasted for three or four months, and was immensely enjoyed by both parties—by Mrs. Wilkyns because she delighted in

dadoes, friezes, Eastern rugs, Japanese screens and the modern science of upholstery; because she had no objection to being seen constantly with a presentable young man; thirdly and chiefly, because his looks, voice, manner, his way of making love mildly and covertly, the shades of his scarfs, the perfume which he used, were grateful to her: in short, he was personally agreeable to her, and she liked to have him about her, though she could scarcely have said why. Germaine enjoyed it because he liked pretty, well-dressed women of good social standing, especially if they were lively and amusing; because he was learning a great deal from Mrs. Wilkyns unconsciously to herself, as he seemed to know beforehand everything she told him; because she flattered him; because he liked to know that people were talking about him and a woman with certain advantages—liked it even better than the woman's society or her preference for him. And of course everybody knew that Mrs. Jack Wilkyns was helping Germaine to fit up his rooms. When they were at length in order he gave a supper to inaugurate them: he would have preferred a dinner, in ordering which he thought himself particularly strong, but Mrs. Wilkyns, in whose honor it was given, voted a supper jollier; so a supper it was, not indeed very jolly, but in the best style. He next set up a T-cart with a neat groom, and engaged one of the waiters of the restaurant, whose capability he had observed, as his private servant, and put him into a quiet livery. He bought a couple of pictures by modern masters with famous names: they were poor specimens, but nobody discovered that immediately. By this time his reserve-fund was exhausted, but he had what he wanted: he had never spent his income, and even on this new scale of splendor he could live considerably within his increased means.

Hitherto, Germaine's chief strength had lain in silence, non-commission, a masterly inactivity. Now, not unnaturally, he lost his head a little, and probably, next to one's character, nothing once lost is so difficult to regain. He grew less prudent: he knew as little as ever about most things, but no longer withheld his opinion so carefully; he became supercilious, talked now and then about caste and breeding, began to give himself airs, and under the influence of Mrs. Wilkyns took to bric-à-brac. His flirtation with her did not relax, and although it did not go much faster or farther than before, its duration attracted attention. Perhaps this was why Jack Wilkyns was the first person to discover the change in Germaine, and one evening, after coming in late to find him *tête-à-tête* with his wife, pronounced him on his departure a puppy.

"A puppy!" she exclaimed, half angry, half frightened. "You never said so before."

"No, for the queer thing about Germaine is that he seems to be ending as most men begin."

Louisa looked down vexed and mortified, wishing to retort in her favorite's defence, but a little intimidated by the first exhibition of jealousy she had seen in her husband and the demoralizing effects of a guilty conscience, albeit guilty only of peccadilloes.

Wilkyns was not pleased with himself: he would rather have vented his drop of spleen on some other occasion, apropos of Valentine's horses or pictures or upholstery: he thought himself a fool for being jealous of his wife, and doubly a fool for showing it. He walked about the room, looking for a new subject of conversation, while Louisa sat thinking how she could get up and go to bed without seeming to be out of temper or frightened, being in some measure both.

But before she moved her husband spoke again: "What's gone with that cream-colored pot which used to stand on this corner of the mantelpiece?"

"You mean that bit of old Satsuma?"

"I suppose so. The housemaid again?"

"No. I—I gave it to Mr. Germaine. Poor Jane is innocent this time, though I dare say before long it would have followed the majolica dish and the bowl from Salviati's."

"If you weren't going to keep it, it wasn't worth while to buy it; and it

cost its weight in gold—gold at 18¾ too—besides the infernal trouble with the custom-house."

"I gave it to Mr. Germaine for his drawing-room on the evening of his supper," she replied, flushing and roused beyond her tremor. "He is very fond of china, and a great judge of it. I did not know that you cared for anything of the sort or knew anything about it;" and with this thrust she rose and left the room as her husband responded, "No, hang it! I've something else to think of than crockery."

Valentine had given up foreign politics for pottery: his table was covered with books on "Ceramics" and "*Céramique*," and he filled his rooms with beautiful bits of modern Worcester and Wedgwood from Briggs in Boston, and treasure-trove of old Sèvres and Dresden from auction. Having average intelligence and an accomplished instructress, he soon knew all that was to be known about the subject except the vital difference between an old specimen and a reproduction, a genuine one and a spurious. Following his usual tactics, however, he said that china was his weak point: the rage had not begun abroad until after he came to X——: if it were antique pottery, Etruscan or Egyptian, it would be a different matter. His authority, however, was accepted unquestioned, and when the Kalæsthetic Club was formed they almost forced the presidency upon him. He refused, saying that he had no ambition for office, and did not like making his play work; nor could he be persuaded to become aught but a manager. They were greatly disappointed, and his value increased because he could not be had. Yet before summer several men made the same discovery that Jack Wilkyns had done early in the winter, and they agreed that the Wilkynses had spoiled him. His firm friend George, however, had expressed his opinion some time before that Val was spreading too much.

Germaine was too well satisfied with himself to perceive these unfavorable dispositions. He had not a keen sense of the ridiculous, and the idea of anybody's laughing at *him* never ruffled the surface of his vast fatuity. He had ended by nearly believing all the things about himself which he wished others to believe—that he was very rich, that he was the handsomest fellow going, that he was a gentleman, a man of the world, a *connoisseur:* he had almost grown to believe, in dreamy after-dinner hours, that he had come from the West Indies and was related to Lord Fitzjermyn. He felt the edifice of his fortunes strong and solid: one thing was wanting, more as an insurance on the building than to complete its integral perfection, yet which would enhance its completeness in every respect. X—— was one of the few remaining cities in which people still sometimes asked about a man, "Who is he?" Although that question had long been satisfactorily answered regarding himself, he felt that a wife whose family everybody knew would settle it for ever. He was thirty-three: he had plenty of time before him, and marriage would inevitably change his terms with Mrs. Wilkyns, which were so pleasant, but could they remain long unaltered in any case? Jack had been gruff several times lately; his wife was sometimes nervous and fluttered; she grew prettier every day, and, frog though Germaine was in temperament, he had found himself unable to sleep more than once after an unusually long and tender talk with her. It would be tame and tepid to go on for ever in the same way, yet he did not wish to go on in any other. His engagement would make a suitable ending to all this, and he had an anticipation of comfort and security, such as he had never actually enjoyed, which a good match would impart to his existence.

Summer dissolved his entanglements momentarily. He promised to go and see the Wilkynses at Newport in September, but that was nearly three months off. First, he was due at the country-house of Maynard, an acquaintance from another city, a member of a trout-fishing club to which Valentine belonged, and with whom he sometimes went to camp, although no human being had seen him throw a fly: the weather was always too hot or cold or wet. "'I leave such vio-

lent exercises to women,' like Pelham," he said.

In the neighborhood of the angler there lived a young girl of about twenty named Eveleen Forsyth, his sister's most intimate friend. She was one of that large class of women who have an inborn necessity for an enthusiasm. From childhood she had constantly been admiring and looking up to somebody who was often in no wise her superior. While at school she had several friends whom she fancied to be vastly more clever and handsome than herself: because she could not play, she thought their jingling the "Sleighbell Galop," or thrumming a march called the "Muffled Drum" with both pedals down at once, brilliant performances; because she did not draw, she thought their album-sketches on tinted paper with ready-made sky and clouds masterpieces. She lived on a fine old family-place, a manor of which they had the original grant, with elms two centuries old spreading over its thousand acres; but she sincerely thought the new villas of those same friends, with their Mansard roofs and twenty yards of trim turf and striped flower-border, stately and beautiful abodes. Not that she envied anybody their possessions: she accepted it as a decree of Fate that other people's houses, horses, clothes, looks, manners, talents and attainments should excel her own; and when these other people happened to be her particular friends she took pride in their surpassing her, while natural sweetness and joyousness preserved her from morbid self-discontent. It had been her ill-fortune not to meet with people of genuine merit who would have given her legitimate objects of admiration and a standard by which to detect pinchbeck; but in her neighborhood such people were not so common as the other sort. Her family were sterling, unpretending gentlefolk, but uninteresting and a good deal behind the times. She was quick, fond of reading, eager for knowledge, novelty and "culture," in which she met with no sympathy from her parents or brothers and sisters, whom she loved deeply, but without enthusiasm. Eveleen had always lived in the country except when at boarding-school, had been but little into society, and had never met before so polished and sophisticated a gentleman as Valentine Germaine. She had heard about him in advance—of his belonging to the Nova Scotia Trout Club and the Chesapeake Canvas-back Club; of his being the arbiter of all moot points in the society of X——; of his having the finest pair of horses and best collection of china and only Alma-Tadema in that city; so he was a hero to her imagination before she saw him. At first she was disappointed in his appearance, but she soon came to think him the handsomest man she had ever seen, and so elegant! so cultivated! It was therefore a pity, but no wonder, that she was carried off her feet when Germaine, charmed by her fresh loveliness, began to pay her marked attentions. Their common friends' magnanimity was severely tried by the turn of events, as her dearest Clara had counted on making a conquest of Valentine herself, and her brother the fisherman had been rejected by Eveleen the year before. The Maynards were very rich people—much richer than the Forsyths—but they were only on the rise, and Eveleen Forsyth was Clara's trump-card in town, as Germaine was her brother's. For Valentine had reached an eminence at which his intimacy conferred distinction, and some younger men talked about him as six years before he might have talked of George Wilkyns if he had been capable of so gross an error. So policy—and better feelings too—made the Maynards generous, and when Valentine and his friend set out for camp, Mr. and Mrs. Maynard, at their children's instance, gave him a pressing invitation to return on his way home. He did return, and before he went away again offered himself to Eveleen, and was accepted. The young girl was excessively in love with him, or with what she imagined him to be, and could not conceive why he preferred her to Clara—could not believe in her own happiness.

When Mr. Forsyth asked Valentine what means he had of supporting his

daughter, Valentine mentioned without pretence or mystification the exact amount of his income, adding that it would probably one day be two or three thousand dollars more a year, but never much larger.

"I must warn you," said the old gentleman, "that I can give my daughter nothing now, nor will she ever have a great deal: she has brothers and sisters, and the old place must be kept up."

Primogeniture was practised by the Forsyths to a limited degree for the sake of keeping the manor intact.

"I had no expectations of anything: I have enough for us both," replied Germaine quietly. "That is, if you think Miss Forsyth will find it enough."

"I should hope so, I should hope so," returned the old gentleman emphatically. He had old-fashioned notions, and his children had not been brought up extravagantly. "And now another question: I understand that you are not originally from X——?"

"No: I am of a West Indian family," said Germaine, hesitating slightly: he then added with an imperceptible effort, "Had you not better inquire of some of your friends, sir? I should be better satisfied."

"Certainly," said Mr. Forsyth cordially, feeling sorry for the young man. "Let me see: it's a quarter of a century since I was in X——. Who is there left?"

"Do you know the Wilkynses?"

"I suppose they're the sons of my old classmate George: he's been dead these ten years."

"Yes—John and George: John is married."

"Well, then, I'll write to him, if you say so."

"Or to any one else you please, sir: the Wilkynses are particular friends of mine."

Germaine conducted himself like a gentleman in this ordeal: Mr. Forsyth appreciated it, and, although he afterward remembered a contemporary of his in X—— of whom he would rather have made inquiries about his daughter's suitor than of those young folks, he felt a compulsion of delicacy and honor to abide by the understanding that he should write to Jack Wilkyns. Accordingly, about the beginning of September, when Louisa was looking wistfully for news of Germaine, one foggy morning at breakfast her husband, after an exclamation over one of his letters, tossed it across the table to her. At the first lines her heart contracted so sharply that she feared she must be turning pale, and got up from the table as if to go nearer the light: she stood with her back to the room, and read the letter very slowly to give herself time for composure. This news was a blow—not a deathblow, but it cut sharp and deep—and her limbs were trembling under her, but if she could only prevent her husband's seeing, suspecting, she could bear the pain.

"Well!" she said when longer silence became unnatural, "this *is* a surprise, but it's very nice. Of course you'll say everything that's right?"

"Hang me if I know what to say!" replied Jack, who had taken up the newspaper, but was watching her from the corner of his eye. "He wants to know all about Germaine: what the deuce do I know about Germaine?"

"Oh, how can you say so?" she exclaimed, finding that she could trust her voice and knees, and walking to the table. "You know *all* about him. We've known him for years and years: I fancy he hasn't an older friend than George in this country, and I suppose there isn't a more honorable, unexceptionable man in X——."

She spoke with warmth, the loyalty of her regard for Germaine mingling with a desire to show zeal in the matter of his marriage.

Her husband was completely deceived. "As to the last clause, you ought to be better informed than I," he said with a grin. "You've had charge of his morals for the last twelvemonth, haven't you? To be sure, I'll write a proper letter and put him through: he's a good fellow, though he *is* a pup. But if I were you I'd have that bit of chany back again."

"If *I* were *you*, I should be ashamed to mention that after your stingy, shabby behavior the last time it was spoken

of. I shall tell him I meant it for a wedding-present." So saying, she left the room, smiling saucily and tossing her head. On the stairs she met her two boys, fine little fellows of ten and eight, dressed like sailors, rushing down with their fishing-tackle to the rocks, loud in complaints against the fog, which would prevent their going off in a boat. She kissed them, and strained them in her arms so closely that the eldest drew himself back and looked at her, but she only bade them run along and not fall into the sea. Half an hour afterward her husband came to her with his letter to Mr. Forsyth to ask if it would do. He had said that Germaine had been a friend of theirs for years, that he was of a wealthy West Indian family — related, he had always heard, to the earl of Fitzjermyn — that he was a gentleman, an excellent fellow, and very much liked in X——. She ran her eye over it and nodded.

"I'm going to drive into town," he said, "and I'll drop it into the post-office as I go by."

"Wait five minutes and I'll give you a line to Valentine."

She wrote a couple of pages of cordial congratulation, dashed with reproach at his not having taken her into his confidence, and begged him to tell Miss Forsyth that she would find at least one friend when she came to X——.

Her husband came back as she was addressing the note, flushed by the effort it had cost her: he held out his hand, saying, "I should like to know the correct thing to say under the circumstances."

"The curiosity of men! When did I want to see a note of yours?" and she gave it to him.

As she heard the house-door close after him she drew a long breath, and threw herself upon a sofa with her hands clasped over her eyes. She had been very much in love with her husband once, and he with her: he was still fond of her — fonder than she was of him — and she knew it; yet, with a contradiction very common in such cases, she took more pains to be agreeable than he did: in fact, there was no great difference between her manner to him now and before her marriage, while the difference in his was immense. She could not think of this without resentment, but she had plenty of common sense, and she reasoned with herself. She had long ago constructed a philosophy of marriage: Jack was a better husband than many of whom she knew; he took no trouble to please her, but he let her please herself in her own way; she really loved her children, and took great pride and enjoyment in them. She had wanted more than this, and she had found amusement, pleasure, solace and a prick of excitement in her intercourse with Valentine; but she had known very well that it could not last for ever, and this was the natural end. She was not in love with him: the feeling was very different from that which she had felt for her husband. She sighed deeply at the remembrance of that girlish happiness which she had thought *would* last for ever, and wondered whether any married woman is really happy. But the pain she suffered from the conclusion of this last episode, as she called it to herself, seemed so out of proportion to what she had enjoyed from it that she made up her mind such recreations do not pay. This had been her first flirtation since her marriage: she resolved that it should be her last; and so it was, in truth, although she got credit for one or two more. The morning passed heavily, but not unprofitably. After several hours she got up from the sofa with a headache and a sore heart, bathed her temples with cologne-water, and went out into the soft, fresh fog to look for the boys.

Germaine's satisfaction in his wooing was disturbed from the first moment by the question of his family—how he should announce his engagement to them; how prevent their writing to Eveleen; how avoid their presence at his wedding. He had not kept up a regular correspondence with them. At first his mother wrote to him on anniversaries, but as he seldom answered she gradually gave it up. His brother had formerly accompanied the quarterly remittance of the rent with a

few lines containing any little household news that there might be to tell, which Valentine had duly acknowledged, adding love to his mother and sister; but since the sale of the house these communications had ceased, and he had not heard from any of them for over a year. He had been so invariably fortunate in his designs and calculations that he could not help expecting some bit of luck to help him out of his present difficulties.

He would not have minded the Forsyths knowing that his family were quiet, respectable people in trade in the interior, but he could not bring himself to share the disclosure with the whole of X——, and he could not request his betrothed and her parents to keep the secret. While he was waiting and putting off writing from day to day, it befel as he hoped. A letter came from his brother to say that he was to be married on the first of November, and asking Valentine to be one of his groomsmen. November had been already spoken of for the latter's marriage, and he now persuaded Eveleen to fix on the second of that month, that they might have the Indian summer for their honeymoon. This settled, he wrote to his brother announcing his engagement, and mentioning that as his own wedding would take place on the second of November he could not be at Robert's: he enclosed a diplomatic note to his mother, telling her of his happiness, regretting that his wedding—which was to be *very* quiet—should fall on the morrow of Robert's, since the distance would prevent either of them from standing by the other on the momentous occasion. He took care not to express even a regret that she and his sister should be absent, lest they should take it into their heads to sacrifice Robert to him. But no such idea occurred to them. Robert's bride was one of their friends, his sister was to be first bridesmaid, and there were gay doings on foot which she would not miss on any account. Valentine's mother, a mild, gentle, sentimental soul, who had given him his name because he was born on the 14th of February, had some unspoken yearnings to see the son who had passed so strangely out of her life and the young lady who was to be his wife; but she had long ago understood that he wished to do without her, and had almost learned to do without him. In her answer to his letter there was a great deal of motherly love and gratification, for Valentine had been unable to forbear alluding to the aristocratic extraction of his bride, just as he had pointed out the houses of his fine acquaintance to Robert; but she only said she was sorry that he could not be with them at Robert's marriage, and sent her regards and his sister's to Miss Forsyth. Valentine felt a faint, transient emotion on reading this letter, and a momentary twinge of compunction, but they passed away quickly, and by the next day had given place to complacency that things had turned out so wonderfully well, and that his family evidently recognized and accepted the terms which he wished to establish. He once said casually to his betrothed that the only relatives he knew of in this country lived in the West, and that he had not seen them for many years: this was the solitary intimation he gave her that he was not alone in the world.

The lovers did not see very much of each other during their engagement: Germaine would not abuse the Maynards' hospitality by prolonging his stay at the villa, and although, of course, he had a standing invitation to the manor, he thought it in better taste not to trespass too much on the short time which Eveleen had to be with her family. Moreover—for after-thoughts are the plague of people in his position—the less he saw of them the fewer opportunities there would be for embarrassing questions and compromising evasions. When practical matters came to be discussed, it turned out that Mr. Forsyth's doing nothing for his daughter meant giving her a furnished house, but she and Valentine agreed between themselves that it would be much better fun—though he never could understand what women meant by "jolly" and "good fun," nor in what it consisted—to begin life in the apartment of which she had

heard so much. As it was less than a year since it had been fitted up, there was nothing to do but turn the room he had furnished in order to be able to tie up a bachelor friend into a suitable bower for Eveleen, which was done under the superintendence of her married sister, Mrs. Martindale, who went to X—— on purpose, and returned with glowing accounts of the exquisite taste and luxury of the flat. By common consent, the wedding was to be a quiet one. Germaine supplied a list of persons to whom cards were to be sent afterward, which included "everybody" in X—— and several well-known names in other cities. "If you can spare me a few cards and a box or two of cake, "he said, "I will address them myself to some friends who live here and there, and save you the trouble." In this way he contrived that his own family should not be passed over, and his calculations were verified to a dot.

CHAPTER II.

ıs the end of December before and Mrs. Germaine took up their at X——. After their wedding- / came Christmas at the Manor: ılentine carried his wife to town, ɜ might enter her new sphere on of January. Mrs. Wilkyns came her immediately, and welcomed rmly. She saw at a glance that present, at least, she had not a the young bride. Eveleen had .uty of perfect fairness and fresh- ˙ auburn hair, of changing expres- f a sweet, ingenuous smile, with ɜ and milk-white teeth; she had ıgure and the manner of a lady; l the advantages of twenty, but in 'ilkyns those of thirty were strong- · trousseau was handsome, but it rom New York, not Paris; and ras a touch of the school-girl in ernate shyness and enthusiasm. vill tone down," thought Louisa, ill out, and, if she does not lose vely complexion, she may turn ngerous in a few years."

:veleen's hours for the first months ɔun of silk and gold thread. There he wedding-presents to unpack, ɔ receive and return: Eveleen in- on her husband's accompanying . her first round, which he did, ɡ loath. Then there were pic- ɔ see—for X—— boasts its private ɜs as well as New York—and silver ass to choose, Mr. Forsyth's con- ɔn toward the establishment until ıould go to housekeeping. Ger- could find nothing good enough —; so there was a correspond- ıith half a dozen silversmiths and ers of glass and china. There estivities for the young couple— s, theatre-parties, dances; the came, then a French company; ent out three or four evenings in the week, which to Eveleen seemed like a whirl of dissipation, and she was secretly a little shocked to find how much she enjoyed it. Her husband took her everywhere amiably, but with an indulgent air of condescension and slight *ennui:* he did not find society so entertaining as when he was a bachelor, but Eveleen had to be launched. He took pride in the admiration which she attracted: both men and women thought her charming; some even pronounced her a beauty; there could be no doubt that she was a success.

Many honeymoons do not last four weeks: theirs lasted four months, but it came to an end at length, like briefer ones.

Lent brought a great slackening in the evening amusements, for the people of X—— are even better Churchmen than Christians; the visits, sightseeing and shopping were finished; the incidental and preliminary part of married life was over: what was beginning was that which was before them to the end. Eveleen had no difficulty in occupying herself: she read a great deal, wrote frequent letters to every member of her family and her paragons of friends, and was a good needlewoman. She took up with ardor the new fashion of artistic embroidery, and showed real talent for it. Her country life had given her the habit of long walks, which she had kept up: she was never at a loss for employment. Valentine, on the contrary, did not know what on earth to do with his time: he could not spend the day in his wife's drawing-room. Formerly, he used to drop into the club every morning and play a game of billiards, but he thought that this would be in bad taste for a newly-married man. He was ashamed to loaf in and out of his friends' offices and counting-houses, which had been another means of killing time. The same objections applied

to the afternoon visits he had been wont to pay to ladies, married and single: he had found it much easier as a bachelor gracefully to support the character of a man of leisure and elegant tastes. He was also ashamed to let his wife see that he did nothing. He walked by himself until the muscles of his legs ached to get rid of the morning, and in the afternoon he walked again with his wife, as it was too cold for driving. Germaine had been fond of playing the *ennuyé*, which he did with more ease than some other parts of his assumed character, as it is natural that a man who has been nowhere and done nothing should be even more bored than Sir Charles Coldstream; but now he was bored in earnest—bored beyond endurance, so that it depressed him and made him irritable. He had looked forward to marriage as a process by which his little moral discomforts and disquietudes would be removed, but the radical flaw of false positions is that they must necessarily be uncomfortable in some direction.

Eveleen worried him in different ways: she was inquisitive by nature, besides having a fond desire to possess herself of his past, and asked him unpleasant questions about his former pursuits, travels, friends. He contrived to evade them, until one day she looked up at him beseechingly and said, "You tell me nothing about yourself, Valentine: you have never spoken of your father and mother."

He grew a tint paler, but replied with presence of mind, "Not now, some other time: there are things which it is painful to recall."

She innocently imagined some sad story of his early life: she felt sure he had been left an orphan very young. She silently pressed his hand to her lips, hastened to change the subject, and left it for him to renew. But she could not suppose that almost every query threatened to puncture the fiction of his existence somewhere or other. He was an adept at assuming, but he did not like lying, which required imagination and nerve. With other people he had got on by suggestion and reticence, but when he said that he had not touched a pencil for years she cried out, "What a shame! I shall make you take it up again. You must show me your sketches."

Germaine's memory reverted to the diagrams he used to draw in the engineer's office, and he said he did not know what had become of them; to which she replied that she should rummage until she found them. But when she went on to ask whether he had sketched in water-colors and a dozen other details, he found himself in a mental perspiration from keeping up with so inquiring a mind. He thought her too demonstrative in society: she laughed and cried too heartily at the theatre; admired other people's possessions too much, and often admired the wrong thing; talked too much about those paragons of whom nobody had ever heard. Once or twice he fancied he had seen a smile exchanged at her effusiveness and exuberance. If he had been what he aimed at being and pretended to be, nothing of this would have annoyed him—at any rate, for its effect upon others—but he was anxious lest, notwithstanding Eveleen's incontestably good birth, she should not be considered high-bred. One day, when a long walk in the March wind, during which he had been revolving the problem of how to get through the rest of the day, had rendered him unusually cross, he came in to lunch and found Eveleen in her own room sewing a button on one of his shirts. He had felt her practical efficiency as a thorn in his side more than once: she had laughed at the notion of having a maid, saying that she and her sisters had been brought up to wait upon themselves; she soon learned to dress her beautiful auburn hair in the prevalent fashion, and took a stitch in her clothes when they needed it. Germaine would have preferred that she should be more helpless, altogether more of a fine lady, but had not known how to object until the day when the wind was in the wrong quarter.

"What are you about, Eveleen?" he asked in a fretful voice. "Is there no servant in the house to do that kind of job?"

"I have been looking over the clothes

from the wash and putting them away, and I found that this shirt needed a button," she answered, smiling, though jarred by the new tone.

"If you will insist upon doing these unnecessary things, at least finish them in the morning: it is half-past one o'clock, and time that a lady should be in her drawing-room. I do not understand your mania for housework."

"The wash did not come home until past twelve."

"Why can't the chambermaid put the clothes away?"

"Oh, I should be afraid she would not count them carefully: she is not our servant, you know—she belongs to the house. Besides, I have been accustomed to take charge of the wash at home: I like to do it."

"That's all very well for Tom, Dick or Harry's wife, but I do not wish *mine* to be either a seamstress or laundress."

Eveleen's delicate cheeks turned crimson, but she laid aside the shirt without a rejoinder, followed her husband into the drawing-room, rang for luncheon and took up her embroidery. Germaine sat down disgusted with himself, wishing to beg Eveleen's pardon, but afraid of putting himself in the wrong. As she worked she occasionally raised her eyes to a picture which hung above his head, and he noticed that tears were trembling on her white eyelids. He got up, bent over her, kissed them away, pressed her hand and sat down on a stool beside her low chair. She returned the pressure of his hand, but did not speak.

"What are you working?" he asked for something to say.

"I am copying the design on the rug in that picture of Alma-Tadema's," she said with a slight quiver on her lip. "I have traced it, see! but it was too troublesome to color this towel-stuff, so I have to watch the shades as I work."

He praised her ingenuity. "It is the best thing in the picture," he said, leaning back and half closing his eyes.

"Why, I thought the picture was beautiful!"

"Oh no: it is not a good example." He had found this out since the purchase. "I got it to cover the wall: some day, when I can pick up something better, I shall get rid of both that and the Daubigny: they answer very well as bits of color."

It may be remarked that the last thing for which the French landscape was valuable where it hung was as a bit of color.

At this moment the servant announced luncheon, and brought in a notice of a special meeting of the Kalæsthetic Club, called for that evening "to consider a matter of pressing importance."

Germaine smiled: "A special meeting. There never was such an event before. I don't know what pressing business there can be, unless Dancey has gone off with the funds."

"Perhaps it is about the Etruscan antiquities I heard him telling you of the other night."

"I do not see how that can be urgent."

It turned out to be the Etruscan antiquities, however, the fame of which had already reached the ears of the connoisseurs of X——. It had obtained some notoriety among those interested in such subjects through the New York papers. These relics had been found in the vineyard of a small proprietor near Chiusi (the ancient Clusium), who, after vainly offering them to the Italian government —which, as everybody knows, does not encourage art—had sent them to America in charge of the distinguished archæologist Signor Vanvitelli, who had heard of the munificence of the Metropolitan Museum. All the directors of that institution knew Signor Vanvitelli by name: some of them had made his acquaintance when he was making a catalogue for the private museum of Prince Porsenna, who has the finest collection of Etruscan remains in Italy. But the Metropolitan Museum had just proved its munificence by purchasing the Cesnola Collection, and although one of the most prominent journals warned them not to throw away the finest opportunity there had been for three thousand years, and one which might not occur again in the same length of time, the directors mournfully shook their heads and buttoned their pockets. The important business for

which the managers of the Kalæsthetic Club had been so suddenly summoned was to consider a letter from Signor Vanvitelli to their president, offering them the collection for fifteen hundred dollars less than he had asked the Metropolitan Museum—"rather than it go out of this noble and generous country," he added. The Kalæsthetic Club had been instituted with the object of founding a museum of art and antiquity to cultivate taste for those and kindred subjects among the X——ites. Money had been liberally subscribed, and Mr. Dancey, the president, had gone to Europe the previous summer for the purpose of studying the management of these departments in the British Museum, Louvre and Hôtel Cluny. He had returned with a magnificent stock of electroplate reproductions, Hildesheim vases, *cinque-cento* vessels, armor, weapons and ornaments of all countries and ages, which made a splendid show in the rooms of the club-house, recently furnished with old oak, mahogany and brass from Wardour street and the Rue du Temple. Members had vied with each other in giving their choicest bits of Derby, Chelsea, Dresden and Sèvres. They bought the stock in trade of a young painter who wished to return to Paris and sold out his moth-eaten tapestry and other properties; but with the exception of these, and an Indian hatchet and some arrowheads presented by an old gentleman who did not clearly understand the nature of the undertaking, there was nothing which was not eminently modern. Here was a glorious opportunity of setting themselves at once on a footing with the first museums of Europe and securing a treasure second to none but Prince Porsenna's.

Everybody knows how jealous New York has always been of X——, especially of its enterprise and liberality, and the idea of possessing a collection which the metropolis had been unable to buy doubled the Kalæsthetics' desire to call it their own. But they were out of funds, as well as the New Yorkers: the electroplates had cost a great deal of money; there had been the fitting-up of the club-house and other expenses. All felt the force of these arguments, and a few thought the sum required too large to give for a number of objects representing but one period of art. The debate was warm, and ended by resolutions to call a general meeting of the members and invite Signor Vanvitelli to attend and bring his collection, after which they could see what was to be done. It was judged to be a good occasion for that formal opening of the new club-house which had been talked of all winter, and on the appointed evening the rooms were filled with a gay crowd examining the furniture, carpets, hangings and bric-à-brac, chattering and moving to and fro with far more animation than is to be seen at an ordinary party. The Germaines came late, as Valentine made it a point to do everywhere since his marriage. Eveleen wore pearl-colored satin, and looked unusually lovely: she had been highly excited about the Etruscan collection. The first persons she encountered on entering the room were Fanny and Kitty Wilkyns, who had come with their sister-in-law and their brother George, Jack having gone off to his club pronouncing the whole business "rot." These girls were first among Eveleen's new friends. She had not seen them for a week, and on meeting she impulsively kissed them both. Her husband, looking over the little heads which were rubbing noses, saw Louisa's handsome face immediately behind them with a sparkle of malice in her brown eyes and the faintest downward curve to her brilliant smile. He bowed, reddened, and, as Eveleen released her friends, took her arm within his and led her apart from them: "I beg, Eveleen, that you will give up that school-girlish trick of kissing everybody everywhere, it is so very like a bread-and-butter miss. I wish your manners had more of that repose that 'stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.'"

Eveleen dropped her eyes and the blood rushed to her face, but before another word could be exchanged George Wilkyns, who had seen the whole byplay, made his way up, and, drawing

her other hand under his arm, disengaged her from her husband, saying eagerly, "I have been on the look-out for you ever since I came. First of all, the Etruscan relics: I wish to show them to you myself." He led her off, laughing and talking to give her time to recover herself, and restraining with some difficulty a desire to squeeze the hand which was on his arm: Germaine followed through the crowd. A committee-room had been reserved for the Etruscan remains, and the conflux was greatest there. Signor Vanvitelli was present—a small, dried-up man with the face of a parrot, magnificent eyes, a smile of rare intelligence and urbanity: he had the exquisite politeness of the Latin races and spoke English remarkably well. He was ready to act as *cicerone* to everybody, but he singled out the influential members of the club with unerring instinct, and kept his confidential communications for them. As the Germaines entered he was discoursing to a little group, not glibly like the common Italian, but with cadenced deliberation.

"Never," he said—"never since the time did begin was so grand, so unique, an occasion: never was such a treasure offered to sell. Prince Porsenna found his on his own estates: he is rich, he can keep them: my poor friend Salimbeni cannot afford to keep his. If Cardinal Albani, if Count Campana, were alive, these would not go out of Italy; but what can we do? The new government cares nothing for art, for history, for antiquity: with the new laws our great houses fear they cannot keep their proper galleries another generation. France is in debt, so no good the Louvre: the British Museum has let go my friend Cesnola's magnificent, maravilious discoveries. So I say to my friend the poor Salimbeni, 'America is a young country: she will want ancient things. She is a nation so humane, so civilized: she knows what is beautiful and precious. She is ambitious: she will have pride to own a great art-treasure.' I come to New York: 'Hard time! hard time!'" departing from his gravity with a tragicomic grimace: then, shaking his fore finger before his face, he resumed in another tone: "'Ah,' I say to myself, 'shopman! shopman! Go we to X——: there intelligence is more than money—they will know.' And for this I offer it to you for fifteen hundred dollars less than to them—fifteen hundred scudi, more than seventee thousand lire!"

A knowing laugh went round the circle at the antiquarian's discernment.

"How soon a man of culture takes the measure of those stock-jobbers!" said Germaine.

Eveleen, although her heart still fluttered painfully under her husband's rebuke, became interested directly in the specimens, some of which struck her as superlatively graceful, others as very ugly and common-looking.

"Here is a cista, and here is a cypræa," said George. "I can tell you all about them, having just heard myself for the first time from the signor. Isn't that a lovely thing?" he said, pointing to a squat, pot-bellied jug of the rudest execution. Eveleen raised her soft, clear gaze doubtfully to his face: their eyes met and they both burst out laughing. "What! you don't admire it, Mrs. Germaine? Where's your culture? to what end have you wrought in crewels all winter?"

"But that *is* beautiful! oh!" she exclaimed, pointing to a small hanging lamp in the form of an angel with long pinions.

"Beautiful, is it not? and another of the million proofs that there is nothing new under the sun. You see that is our modern angel, a regular Gabriel, yet—Signor Vanvitelli again—this type, which was lost for two thousand years, was familiar to the Etruscans."

Here Mr. Dancey, the president, came up: he was a pudgy young man with the face and head of a new-born baby, and hands which appeared to have no bones, which he waved and wrung when under excitement: "Mrs. Germaine, I want to show you an exquisite specimen of a strigil: there is nothing so perfect in London or Paris. And did you notice that delicious amphora beside the door?"

George was not pleased at having Mrs.

Germaine carried away, and considered Dancey worse than a prig to run off these terms, which he was convinced the other had heard for the first time that day. He stuck to them.

"Is it not too bad that we must let them go?" pursued the president. "Such an opportunity, as Signor Vanvitelli says, has not occurred for three thousand years."

"Why, naturally," cut in George, "the Etruscans didn't give millions of sestertiæ or scudi, or whatever their legal tender was, for their own pots and pans."

"But must you let them go?" said Eveleen.

"I'm afraid so, unless somebody will start with a thousand-dollar subscription to set us afloat."

Here they brushed against Mrs. Wilkyns again, on Germaine's arm. Dancey, who always wanted to talk to the woman somebody else was talking to, accosted her: "Mrs. Wilkyns, have you seen that fascinating celadon vase, the mate of yours?"

"Don't speak of my poor vase!"

"You make me shiver: what has happened to it?"

"The usual thing," she returned with a shrug: "it has shared the fate of the majolica dish and the Venetian bowl."

"How horrible!" said Dancey from his very soul.

"We shall never be able to keep our treasures until we adopt the Roman plan," said a rich, deep voice over her shoulder. It was Dick Allen's elder brother, a lawyer, who enjoyed the reputation of being the most agreeable man in X——. He was fond of familiar classical quotations and historical anecdotes, which he generally told to women not given to reading.

"The Roman plan?"

"Yes, the ancient Roman: you remember the story of Augustus and the vase?"

"Not I, indeed!" said Mrs. Wilkyns, much too clever to wish to be thought a blue.

"Augustus was at a supper, a very swell supper, given to him by a Roman noble, and a slave broke a priceless vase, on which his master ordered him to be thrown alive into the carp-pond."

"Oh!" exclaimed Louisa and Eveleen in chorus, shocked, but laughing.

"And as we have no emperor, we do not run the risk of having the rest of our vases smashed on the spot, as befell the host of Augustus when the slave appealed to Cæsar for mercy," pursued Allen.

"But as we have no slaves either, I fear we shall merely continue to have them smashed—without mercy," rejoined Louisa.

"All of which is additional proof of what I said to you just now, Mrs. Germaine," said George Wilkyns, getting possession of her again—"that there is nothing new under the sun: the Romans had bric-à-brac, and their servants broke it."

Driving home that night with his sisters, George Wilkyns suddenly said, "Why is Val Germaine not more in love with his wife?"

"Because he can be in love with nobody but himself," replied Louisa too hastily, regretting it the next moment. It was amazing that, seeing so much less of Germaine than last winter, she knew so much more about him. He had impressed her particularly that evening. His force had formerly been negative, but of late he had become positive. They had been looking at a picture by Gérôme, a recent acquisition of the club, and he languidly remarked that it was out of drawing, but when she asked him where, he had waived the point. Later on a young lady had sung, a girl with a beautiful voice who had taken lessons in Paris, whence she had lately returned: Germaine stroked his moustache, said it was a fine organ, but that she sang false; to which Louisa had replied curtly, the girl being a sort of pet with her, "So does Nilsson sometimes." And she meditated within herself whether this *nil-admirari* attitude, which had long imposed upon her, might not have some humbug in it.

Meanwhile, Eveleen, having forgotten her mortification in the interest and enjoyment of the evening, was unfolding a scheme to her husband, who was unusually tender to her, his conscience smiting him for having snubbed her: "Val, they say if somebody would start

a subscription with a thousand dollars the sum might be made up to buy those things; and it is such a pity to let them go out of the country!"

"A great pity, but who will put down the thousand dollars? Last winter I would have done so in a moment, but I have allowed myself such an expensive little luxury since that I can't afford it."

"Yes you can. You know all that money papa gave me for the silver and things which we have never got? We have not seen anything that we like, and we might easily go on as we are doing long enough to make up that money."

"And embezzle your father's wedding-presents? Upon my word! With what sort of face should I present myself at the Manor with such a story as that?"

But she was so earnest that Germaine, not averse to taking the lead in the movement, went next day to Dancey and put his name down for one thousand dollars. He explained that the money came from his wife, adding, "Perhaps I ought not to let her do it, but it is such an unrivalled collection, it is such a miracle of luck our having the chance, that, as her heart is set upon it, I cannot find it in mine to oppose her." Six months before he would not have expressed himself so emphatically, but he had begun to consider himself infallible.

Signor Vanvitelli was Dancey's guest, and had consented to stay for a day or two longer: the latter was getting up a dinner for him for that evening, and had already sent to beg Mr. and Mrs. Germaine to honor him with their company. The subscription was set going, and in the evening, when ten of them met at dinner, the sum was already made up. Poor Dancey looked thinner for his exertions of the past twenty-four hours: he had sat up almost until morning helping Signor Vanvitelli repack the antiquities, as the precious trust must be exposed to no risks; he had been showing his guest the lions of X——, getting up his dinner, and running about to find subscribers; and he was not a person who liked to do two things at a time or be hurried in doing one. But the unexpected success of the attempt and of securing just the people he wanted at dinner, together with Signor Vanvitelli's admiration of X——, which he pronounced the most interesting, characteristic and sympathetic city he had seen in America, filled the measure of his satisfaction. He was able to enjoy every dish of his well-cooked, well-served dinner, making everybody pass round the plates of the dessert service that the whole party might see the painting upon them. The chief topic of conversation was the Etruscan collection, "unrivalled, unequalled," as Germaine repeated several times, and there was a proposition to have female members of the Kalæsthetic Club, in perpetual honor of Mrs. Germaine. Mrs. Wilkyns promised that if they would do so she would give them all her china, which she thought she should soon see the last of otherwise; whereupon her husband called out "Corruption!" across the table, and that it was the most barefaced bribery, and a sample of the sort of thing we might expect if women were allowed votes. Eveleen said, among the general laughter, that she was afraid her sex must be innately corrupt, and was about to relate her embezzlement, but was checked by a side glance from Germaine, who preferred that the matter should remain upon the more magnificent footing on which he had placed it in the morning. So they broke up and went home in high good-humor, exchanging mutual regrets with Signor Vanvitelli, who found himself obliged to go away early the next day, and could not remain to accept several other invitations.

Before they separated Mr. Dancey asked Eveleen if she would come to the club-house—which was only open in the evening—the next day but one and help him unpack the Etruscan relics again. Like Germaine, he was a man of leisure, but he had a hundred fiddle-faddles to attend to every day, and nobody could be busier; so that he was often obliged to call for assistance, which he preferred should be feminine. George Wilkyns or Dick Allen would not have ventured to propose such a thing to Eveleen, who would have shrunk from it as a fast proceeding had they done so; but neither she nor any-

body else thought it scandalous, or even strange, that Dancey should make the request and that she should accede. He was one of those men who enjoy unaccountable immunities which excite no envy in their own sex. The morning fixed upon happened to be Saturday. Eveleen liked Saturday, not having yet lost the half-holiday feeling which during our younger years is associated with the seventh day: she always got up in good spirits and with a pleasant sense of expectation on Saturday morning, and on this particular one went round to the club in great glee, like a child to play at tea-party. But she was an excellent worker, and was soon deep in straw and sawdust, while Dancey unwrapped the objects, which she handed him, from their paper jackets. The specimens had neat little labels upon them corresponding to numbers in a catalogue which Signor Vanvitelli had left for their guidance. They agreed that these were disfiguring, and should be removed: the numbers must be written on checks and tied to the objects. Dancey had a drawerful of them at home of a peculiar size and shape, which he had himself invented after much thought, and actually made with his own boneless hands after being buffeted about between a stationer and bookbinder, each of whom, after taking the order given with minute explicitness, had made them entirely different from the directions, and then angrily refused to have anything more to do with it, as it was not in his line: it was a bookbinder's or a stationer's, whichever he happened not to be. Dancey was naturally proud of his creation, and felt as if the genuineness of an object was attested by its owning one of these tabs. He hurried off to his house to bring back a provision of them. Meanwhile, Eveleen's pink finger-tips had been unable to resist picking the little round of paper off one of the vases, and as the dry paste left a spot, she got fresh water and washed it off carefully. On the red figure beneath, a lanky cup-bearer, there was a black smutch, as if the ink had soaked through the label. It did not wash off She had in her pocket a little parcel of oxalic acid, which she had brought with her in case of having to copy the catalogue, as she could not write without inking her fingers. She moistened a grain of this and began delicately rubbing the mark on the vase: it came off easily, but as she wiped the surface dry she was appalled to find that off came black and red too. In her agitation and agony she dropped the vase, which broke in half. At this crisis Dancey returned, and saw her, perfectly colorless, leaning against a table for support and pointing helplessly to the fragments. He waved and wrung his little hands in unutterable dismay: then, seeing the tears drown the dovelike eyes, he ran up to her, caught her hand and entreated her not to mind it. "Nothing so easy as to mend it so that it will never be seen, and we'll tell nobody. See! it's only in two bits, and not a splinter off the edges."

He picked them up, but on looking at them his own face grew gray and ghastly and his jaw dropped like a dead man's.

Eveleen, understanding nothing of the change in his countenance, started forward in her turn and laid her hand on his arm with a rising sob: "What is it? what's the matter? Can't it be mended?"

He tottered to a sofa, where he sat examining the two pieces with the perspiration standing on his livid forehead.

"Oh what *is* it?" cried Eveleen, beside herself with distress and curiosity. "Tell me, for Heaven's sake!" She perceived that something more dreadful than the accident had come to light.

Dancey tried to collect himself: he put his finger on his lip, rose and locked the door. Eveleen was invaded by a nameless terror. "Hush-sh!" he whispered, coming close to her and holding out the fragments of the vase: the broken edges disclosed as the innermost material a coarse white plaster. "This is not a real antique: it's spurious, an imitation, a forgery, a fraud!"

Her emotions at this announcement were so conflicting that she broke into an hysterical laugh. He looked at her as if she had blasphemed. "Hush-sh!" he repeated. "We must ascertain whe-

ther it is only this single piece or whether—" He gasped, unable to finish the sentence.

Eveleen drank a glass of water and steadied her nerves: she then narrated exactly how the misfortune had happened. They repeated the experiment with the acid upon the broken vase, and the color came off under it everywhere, although the coating of black was so thick that it was almost impossible to reach the white foundation merely in that manner. Then came the question whether the whole collection was an imposture. They agreed, if this one specimen only should turn out to be spurious, to say nothing about it, as it might have got among the rest by accident. An hour or two went by in rubbing with the acid and scraping with a penknife, the result of which was that, as far as such tests could be applied to the different materials, there were but two genuine antiques among the whole, both of common form and execution, both chipped —articles of small value, no doubt, introduced to vouch for the rest. Secrecy was impossible.

The history of the deception was briefly this, as learned in time and tribulation by the Kalæsthetic Club and communicated by them to the world at large: Signor Vanvitelli was not an impostor in the full sense of the word: he was a learned archæologist, and had been in posts of importance and confidence; but as his knowledge did not bring him wealth, he grew tired of empty fame. He formed a plan for enriching himself: by taking casts of Prince Porsenna's collection he got perfect reproductions of the originals, which he and his ingenious friend, the poor Salimbeni, coated, colored, carved, buried and dug up. He added a few real Etruscan objects, the refuse of Prince Porsenna's museum, with which that magnificent patron had presented him; and, thus provided, set forth to seek his fortune in the New World. He had sailed in the French steamer the day after leaving X——, and extradition laws have thus far been unable to reach him.

The chagrin of the Kalæsthetic Club, of half the society of X——, was excessive: the other half made extremely merry over the misadventure. The club related many times for its consolation and vindication the history of the Florentine sculptor who imposed upon the Louvre with a pseudo-antique statue, and of the Berlin archæologists who had been taken in so recently by a collection of spurious Oriental antiquities; but they could not make themselves happy with these precedents, nor deaden in their ears the laughter of the Metropolitan Museum (not a man of whom had doubted the integrity of the specimens when under debate in New York), nor silence the jeers of Jack Wilkyns—who had not subscribed to the "put-up job," as he called it—and others of his kidney. It was decided not to destroy the collection, but to preserve it as (what it undeniably was) a set of facsimiles. The chief ridicule attached to Germaine and Dancey as the promoters of the purchase and for having pronounced so strongly on its merits. It was in vain that Dancey repeated the anecdotes of the connoisseurs of the Louvre and Berlin to everybody, including the man who had first told him the stories: he winced and writhed when Jack Wilkyns complimented him on having enriched X—— with the finest collection of counterfeits in the world.

His sufferings were mild compared to Germaine's, although the latter affected the sublime indifference suitable to a man of real knowledge under such circumstances: he was sore from head to foot about the business, and it was never out of his mind for an hour. He was secretly aggrieved at his wife as the cause of the whole mischief—first, by her intemperate enthusiasm, then by her incorrigible industry—but he was too conscious of the injustice of the grudge to betray it. He began, however, to talk of having had enough of X——, and one day asked Eveleen how she would like to go to Europe. A few months earlier nothing would have delighted her more than such a project, but she had a new subject of happiness, which filled her with joyful excitement—greater even than that of most women who are for the first time what

the Germans call "of good hope." Her health and loveliness were unimpaired by her condition, but she was anxious to meet the event under her mother's wing; so the subject was postponed until the following spring. Her pretty little preparations kept her busier and blither than ever, and prevented her noticing her husband's increasing moodiness. He found some distraction from the smart and bruises of his vanity in making arrangements for the summer. Eveleen would have liked to go to the Manor immediately on leaving town, but her husband told her candidly that five months of the country would bore him to extinction, and she felt that it was too much to ask. So they began by Long Branch, went next to the Springs, and wound up in September by a fortnight at Newport with the Wilkynses. This visit was a sacrifice on Eveleen's part to her husband, and on his to speciousness. He had grown to detest Jack since the Etruscan affair, and had become indifferent to Louisa since she had ceased to be sentimental about him; but they were the people of all others in X—— the appearance of whose intimacy he desired for himself and his wife. So they went, and Jack was almost tender to Eveleen in his kindness and consideration, while Valentine and Louisa played at flirting again, mutually conscious of the pretence.

The Germaines had to pass through X—— on their way from Newport to the Manor, and arranged to stay in town for a day and night, that Eveleen might make some change in the contents of her trunks. Their rooms had been dismantled before they left town; that is, books and the small objects which give life to an abode were put away; the pictures, bronzes and furniture were shrouded in summer holland; the clock on the mantelpiece had run down; and on the table were a heap of cards and a few unimportant-looking letters which had the air of invitations and belated bills. On seeing the desolate aspect of the apartment they decided to have their meals in the restaurant rather than in their cheerless dining-room, sent for the housemaid to open the windows, and went down stairs at once to have an early dinner, as Germaine wished to go to his banker's and Eveleen had shopping to do. The restaurant was deserted save for one other couple, who were sitting at a table overlooking the street. They were a young man and woman, whose appearance was what, for want of a better word, might be termed "countrified," although nothing could be further from rustic simplicity than their attire. He was dressed in a black suit of a grotesque cut, but shiny with newness; he wore a blue shirt of a large plaid, with mosaic studs and sleeve-buttons; his oily, dark hair was brushed back like a curling billow from his round face. Underneath her flowery hat, which was set far back on one side of her head, was seen her frizzy hair, golden with the gold of aurelline: she was faintly painted under the eyes, her lips were suspiciously red, and her face was white with pearl-powder: she was dressed in a showy, ill-made light travelling-costume, an Elizabethan ruff leaving about six inches of her throat bare, on which hung a heavy gold chain and locket. She did not look disreputable, however; only indescribably vulgar and provincial. Eveleen was in high spirits at the near prospect of home, as she had seen none of her family since Christmas except Mrs. Martindale, who had stopped in X—— for a day or two in April on her way from Florida. She was not addicted to making fun of others, but after the people she had been seeing at Newport the pretentious and extravagant absurdity of this pair disturbed her easily-moved risibles. She looked over at them slyly between the courses of the dinner, and laughed behind her bill of fare. Germaine, after one contemptuous glance, sat down with his back to them, and wondered that his wife could be such a child. She was not deterred, but continued to look and titter while they were looking another way. The unconscious pair giggled and talked to their hearts' content in a loud twanging tone—not the twang of the Yankee nor the Southern nasal drawl, but the steam circular saw of the western edge of the Middle States.

By degrees they lowered their tones and began casting glances, and apparently making comments, on the other couple.

"They're laughing at *us* now," said Eveleen, looking down to avoid meeting their eyes, but showing all her white teeth.

"For shame!" said Germaine without moving, but smiling under his long moustache, unable to resist her look of mirth. The bridal pair finished their meal, and the young man, instead of paying for it by the uninterested waiter, who had become suddenly assiduous, went to the desk himself. He had some confidential conversation with the bookkeeper: then returned to his bride, and had further whispered communications with her. Finally, both got up and advanced toward the Germaines, smiling broadly.

"Bless me!" said Eveleen in a whisper, "they're coming over to us! They *can't* have heard— Yes, indeed they are, Val."

He turned his head carelessly: the others were literally upon them.

He got up from his chair, and at the same instant the young woman threw her arms round his neck: "I guess you don't know me, brother Val: it's Amanda. Eight years is a long while. I shouldn't have known you, either, though I don't know why, for you haven't changed a bit. Is this sister Eveleen?"—She let go of her brother and embraced Eveleen: "If I may be so bold.—This is my husband, Mr. Manderson. It's our wedding-trip—'the wedding-journey,' as Howells says. Isn't he splendid? Howells, I mean, not Mr. Manderson" (with a whinnying laugh at her bridegroom). "Don't you recollect the Mandersons of Cheyenne street? You married for blood," with an engaging smile toward Eveleen: "well, *I* married for money," with an arch one to her lord and master, who smiled fatuously in return. "But how you've treated us!—never taking any notice of ma's letter or the wedding-invitation! Real mean! I made up my mind to cut you, but when the folks here said you'd been away three months and had a lot of letters waiting for you, we guessed you'd never got ours, and that was the how. It was a short engagement: he'd been courting so long, and when I said Yes at last he said he wouldn't wait any longer. If he'd have taken No for an answer, we wouldn't be here now; but I married him to get rid of him, as they say, and here we are. We were married two weeks ago, and have been to Niagara and Lake George and all round. Elegant scenery, perfectly ex*qui*site! Pleasure first, then business; and that's what we're here for. Mr. Manderson's gone into partnership with brother Bob, and there's to be a branch at X——, and Mr. Manderson takes charge of it. We've come to look about for a house, for we want to settle down right off; so you may expect the pleasure of our society next winter."

Germaine's eyes had been fixed upon his sister in a silent, stony stare, as if she had been the Gorgon, but this awful torrent was suddenly checked by a stifled moan from Eveleen. They all turned toward her. She had sprung up at Amanda's first words, but gradually sank back upon her chair, where she was lying, deadly pale, with half-closed eyes. They all rushed toward her, and Valentine caught her in his arms.

"Fits?" whispered Amanda as she dipped a napkin in some iced water and laid it on her brow.

"No, she's only faint: you see her condition?"

"Oh my! I hadn't remarked," said the bride, blushing through her pearl-powder.

Eveleen made a strong effort and said in a broken voice, "If—if I could get to my room!" He raised her in his arms and motioned to the bookkeeper, who had come hastily forward, to lift her feet.

"Let me help," cried Amanda with real sympathy and solicitude as they carried her sister-in-law off.

"Stay where you are," said her brother peremptorily.—Then nodding to Manderson: "You'll excuse me: I'll see you again. Where are you?"

"All right! We're at the Clarendon."

At the foot of the stairs Eveleen beg-

ged feebly to be set down, shook her head at the bookkeeper's offers of assistance, and, half carried by her husband, reached her room. She fell upon the bed: he opened her travelling-bag and brought her a bottle of aromatic salts. She lay for some time with her eyes closed, he bathing her temples and wrists.

"Let me send for a doctor," he said at length.

"No," she said, opening her eyes and sitting up: "it is passing off. Valentine, why did you not tell me that you had a mother and sister?"

"Can you wonder?" was his sole reply. She closed her eyes and laid her head down again. "Please leave me now: I am better. I want to be alone." He stood irresolute for a moment, but her breathing was regular and her color was coming back: he took up his hat and went out, telling the housemaid to look after her.

Germaine's answer had been made on impulse, but was untrue as well as cowardly. When he had last seen his sister she had been a quiet little girl of fourteen, as unlike her present self as a primrose is to a sunflower. There must have been germs of the same aspirations which had swelled the soul of Valentine: the influence of the day and her restricted sphere had called them out in this form. Prosperity had given her a desire to shine, and fashion was governed in Minniskunk by the great West rather than by the Atlantic cities. Had Eveleen known that her husband had a sister, the latter's excessive vulgarity and bad style would have made a much greater impression upon her: as it was, she almost lost sight of them in the overwhelming shock of the discovery. She lay still for a long time, trying to wake up from what had happened as if it were a bad dream: then to wake up to its reality. She could not guess how much more there might be to learn. Were both her husband's parents alive? how many brothers and sisters had he? what sort of people were they? She shuddered at the sudden thought that some disgraceful revelation might be in store for her. (It was beyond her conception that mere snobbishness could have been his only motive for concealment.) This idea was horrible. She got up and went into the drawing-room: there lay a letter and an envelope full of large cards with the same postmark and addressed in the same hand: these must be from his home. On ordinary occasions curiosity would have prompted her to open them, whether she would have yielded to the temptation or not, but to-day she felt none: she shrank from finding out something it would be dreadful to know. She went to her bedroom, and mechanically began to bathe her eyes: on a ledge of the washstand was a small paper of oxalic acid, left behind when she went away. It recalled the morning at the Kalæsthetic Club and the broken vase. A freak of association and fancy gave an allegorical significance to the story: her husband was a sham, and the false colors were rubbing off. A short attack of hysterics followed this: she began walking to and fro through the rooms to try and calm herself. The letters again lay before her: she took them up again, but not with curiosity: she must know all and end this torture of uncertainty. She threw them down with a revulsion of feeling. No, she would learn her husband's secret from himself only: whatever it might be, she was sure *he* had done nothing disgraceful. She went back to her bedroom and began unpacking one of her trunks: she took out her summer dresses to make room for a chestful of little white garments trimmed and embroidered and tied in packages with narrow pink and blue ribbon. At the sight of them the recollection of the immense happiness with which her heart had been overflowing that morning rushed back upon her: she dropped upon the floor beside the trunk with her head upon the little clothes and cried as if her heart were breaking.

Germaine, on going out, walked for miles through the least-frequented streets at a pace which made the few people he met turn to look after him. He spent an hour in cursing his fate, his sister Amanda Manderson, his whole family, and in thinking how it might have been avoided

if they had dined up stairs or an hour later, and in all those vain speculations on past possibilities with which we torment ourselves when something has been done which cannot be undone. Yet no, after all, that Manderson man was coming to X——: that must have brought it about at all events, and probably in a worse way; for it might have been worse: this encounter might have taken place in coming out of the theatre or church, or when the restaurant was full of people. Not even the waiters and bookkeeper had heard what took place: they had only come forward when Eveleen fainted. Her fainting was a bit of luck too: it cut short the interview. He was not a brute, however, and he said, "Poor Eveleen!" aloud repeatedly in the course of that miserable walk. He had some wild notions—to go away and never see her again, leaving a letter settling half his property upon her and desiring her to go back to her family: he thought of Claude Melnotte departing to return famous, but with all his vanity he knew himself too well to indulge in such dreams, nor was he of the stuff to break through habits and conventionalities; he could not vanish through a trap-door: it all ended in the mere necessity of going back to her. What should he tell her? After much controversy with himself he decided that it could be only the truth: the Mandersons were coming to X——, the relationship would be known immediately, and no doubt every other circumstance of his family history: he had seen at a glance that Manderson was the sort of fellow who would tell everything he knew to everybody. Why had he not told her at first? There was no use in asking now, yet he did so again and again, and thought of the various ways and times in which it had once been possible. He had always known in his heart that he could have told his wife and her family even before his marriage; but the world must have known: now they must know and the world too. For the first time it struck him that had the world known in the beginning it would have been no practical obstacle to him: he would not have enjoyed the benefits of the *omne ignotum pro magnifico*, but every one of the young men who had taken him by the hand as a stranger would have done so equally if they had known the truth about him: every one of the women would have smiled upon him as sweetly if he had appeared among them on his own merits, like fifty other men in the society of X—— whose connections were not more distinguished than his own. Now the truth would be an exposure. His mistake had been to suppose that everybody was as snobbish as himself. But time was passing: he must act, for the grip of the inevitable constrained him. He usually left things to take their own course: they had done so with a vengeance, and now he must get out of their way.

He hurried to bank, got there as it was closing, and transacted his business: he called at the Clarendon Hotel, paid the obnoxious Mandersons a visit to prevent their making a descent upon Eveleen that evening, and said that she would come the next day if well enough; then he returned to her. He found her exhausted by weeping, but perfectly quiet, grave, but not reproachful. He persuaded her to lie down on a lounge in the drawing-room, made tea for her, and, sitting down beside her in the twilight, told her his story — not exactly as set down here, but with entire adherence to fact. The manner of his narrative was an appeal for sympathy. He said that he had never claimed relationship with Lord Fitzjermyn, and did not know how that idea had got abroad; his grandfather had come from the West Indies, which was all that he knew of the origin of his family; his immediate relatives had always been uncongenial to him; Minniskunk had been odious to him from a child; he had resolved as a boy to go away from it as soon as he could; it was thirteen years since he had done so: it was hard for him at times to remember that he had a family—his early life seemed like a prior state of existence. He had come to X—— to cut loose from his past—he wished to ignore and forget it: he had stated nothing about himself but what was true; if others had invented

antecedents for him, he was not bound to set them right, as it would have defeated the scheme of life he proposed for himself. He had suffered perpetually from their self-deception, however, and this wretched disclosure was but the natural conclusion of the whole misunderstanding.

Eveleen listened, not wholly in silence, yet saying little: incredible as it may seem to some women, she took his hand in hers and held it clasped to her breast. He next told her his projects, for, notwithstanding his remorse, it did not occur to him to ask her what she would like him to do. The Mandersons would make it impossible for them to live in X——; therefore as soon as she could travel after the birth of her child they would go abroad for a couple of years until the commotion had blown over, and determine at leisure where they should make their future home. He ended by requesting her to say nothing to her parents before they left the country: she could write afterward and make any explanation she thought fit.

The next morning Eveleen showed traces of a sleepless night, but was perfectly able to travel. She told her husband gravely that she had a change of plan to propose: she wished to sail at once. "I could not spend two months at home with a mask on my face and heart," she said: "I could not do it, Valentine. We will go for a week or two to say good-bye, and then we will sail."

Germaine was astonished. He had never seen Eveleen assert herself before: she had always acquiesced in his decisions and arrangements without a word. The idea struck him as a good one, and suited the exigences of his position better than any other, but he would run no risk for her health.

"I have thought of that," she replied; "and if you will take me to Dr. Blackett's office he will tell us if there is any danger."

Valentine would not consent to this, but went off and caught the doctor as he was stepping into his coupé, and *brought* him round to see her. He said that she might go with entire safety; so the question was settled.

Germaine left his wife at the Manor, and came back to X—— to do what was requisite before their departure. He had difficulty about storing his furniture, a difficulty with his landlord about the unexpired lease of the flat, and sold his horses and T cart at a ridiculous sacrifice. All this did not tend to soothe his temper, and he had not been in town two days before he found that a number of his business-acquaintance had heard of the Mandersons and his connection with them. His own set was out of town, but he ran against the story in some shape every day. To crown his martyrdom, Jack Wilkyns came down from Newport unexpectedly, and of course heard several versions. He was divided between rage at having been what he called "sold" and a vengeful satisfaction. "I always knew he was bogus," he said, not quite sincerely, for it irritated him to remember the footing of intimacy on which Germaine had been at his house and with his wife. X—— had received Germaine with open arms: when the Jack Wilkynses came back from abroad he was an old institution, but they had given currency to the fable about Lord Fitzjermyn, and, although Jack had never heard that or any other reference to his private affairs and connections from Valentine, he felt, not unjustly, that he had been taken in. Germaine kept away from the club and the restaurant, but he could not transact his business invisibly, and coming out of his bank one day met Wilkyns face to face.

"Halloa!" said Jack, holding him fast by the hand he was pretending to shake. "Why, I hear a lot of your relations have turned up. Glad of it — always thought you were a poor orphling. Brother in biscuits, eh? Sly dog! that's how you came to have such a fine eye for the *pâte* of chany."

For this Germaine sent him a challenge: he did not lack physical courage, and he was so uncomfortable in those days that he thought perhaps to be shot would be the best thing that could happen to him, while if he could put a ball

adversary he would leave X——
aze of glory. But Wilkyns de-
he knew that the world would
t a duel between Germaine and
had to do with his wife, and that
l be thought they had both come
on purpose to fight. He replied
had given no cause to demand
ion. Germaine knew that: he
ot push it further on the present
, and he had no time to waste
oking Wilkyns to a quarrel; be-
ich, though ready and anxious to
gression was foreign to his hab-
ilkyns himself was entirely un-
ed about his reputation: he felt,
erybody else felt, that an impu-
f cowardice could not stick to
repeated his joke widely, and
ck to Newport with it and the
tory; and if there was another
who enjoyed it as little as Ger-
it was Mrs. Jack Wilkyns.

Eveleen's fortnight at the Manor
y sad. It was impossible for her
ot to suspect some painful mys-
der her changed demeanor and
den and inopportune departure.
d heard a rumor of Germaine's
attentions to Louisa, and half
that the Newport visit might
ven Eveleen cause for unhap-
so that when in time she wrote
r account of the true ground of
ble they were almost relieved
was not worse.

five years since the Germaines
road. In the first wonder and
ment of Europe, Eveleen par-
got her distress, but her belief
usband had been destroyed; she
doubted him in everything, and as, under the test of foreign travel, his false colors were incessantly betrayed, she constantly thought of the Etruscan vase. Her admiration for him was gone, and with it her love ebbed lower. Germaine could see no attraction in a woman from whom he did not receive some amount of adulation, and was soon more indifferent to his wife than she was to him, for Eveleen was of that essentially feminine nature whose affections are held by the mere bond of wedlock: he was the love of her youth, the father of her children, a human being whose fate was bound up with hers. But she is not to be pitied too much: she dotes upon her children and has a new and unfailing source of enthusiasm. At a small Swiss inn where they were kept for three days by bad weather she met a most interesting and fascinating woman, the accomplished authoress of *Spiritual Life in the Best Society*, *The Veil of Gauze* and *Orange-flower Water*, which have gone through many editions and been translated into several languages. The two formed a romantic friendship, which has resulted in Eveleen's joining the Roman Catholic Church. Her husband did not oppose this step, as he thinks the religion of women of no importance, provided they have one, and, moreover, it has been the means of introducing them into high foreign society. He has not yet found his proper sphere, a place in which he feels at perfect ease and is not bored, and has come to the conclusion that life is a failure. But he does not speak of coming home, as he says that America is no country for a gentleman.

III.
NARCISSUS.

CHAPTER I.

IT was past eleven o'clock, and the ball was at its best. The atmosphere had not become hot and heavy; the toilettes, flowers and faces had lost none of their freshness; the music grew more and more inspiriting, marked by the light beat of the dancing and the faint rustle of flying drapery. It was the moment when the poetry of such a scene is most palpable, when the allegory is least painful: it was like youth before illusion is gone. Near the principal door stood a man of seven or eight and twenty, who, under an assumption of looking idly on at the spectacle, was evidently on the watch for somebody, but divided his attention with his own reflection in the great looking-glass opposite the entrance. Both the doorway and the frame of the mirror were hidden by tall, large-leaved tropical plants and drooping creepers, producing the effect of a series of woodland arcades in a southern forest. The fleecy dresses of the young women—for it was in the days of tulle and tarletan—were singularly well adapted to this picturesque setting: it did not require much imagination to fancy their wearers nymphs and dryads, and they looked still more like the sylphs in a fantastic ballet. They even invested their partners with a passing grace as the airy folds and flounces enveloped both and the two heads seemed to rise from the same light cloud. The gentlemen who were not dancing forfeited this embellishment, and the young man near the door, as he cast sidelong glances in the opposite direction, pondered on the folly of his sex in foregoing all the advantages of dress. He mentally composed a costume of velvet and satin, with ruffles of lace, which would put him on a par with any beauty in the room, to say the least of it: the difficulty was to find an occasion to wear it. He made up his mind to have a very swell dressing-gown: he wished that American lawyers wore gowns; the bar would be more of a career, and with his grace of gesture and talent for speaking—

His contemplation of himself this time was prolonged. On turning his gaze once more to the door it rested on a couple waltzing by: he started with a suppressed exclamation of annoyance. The young lady, brought face to face with him for a second, met his eyes across her partner's shoulder and bowed almost imperceptibly, with a slight smile. The young man flushed hotly: how unlucky he was! how well he knew what that smile meant! He moved from his post slowly, looking after them as they whirled away. The lady was tall and slender, but a suppleness and roundness in her figure foretold an early *embonpoint:* her head was small, and she carried it in a way that suggested pride, a notion which was strengthened by the expression of her dark eyes, of her small, high-bridged nose and short, full chin. But there was a characteristic which predominated over every other: the slender dark eyebrows rose rather sharply toward the temples; the line of the nostrils and corners of the mouth took the same direction: it was the Mephistophelian type subdued to beauty, and gave the brilliant face a satirical expression which kept many men at a distance. This gave the edge to her smile, which cut the gentleman in waiting like the lash of her little riding-whip: it inflicted a sense of humiliation as well as irritation, but provoked a desire for revenge, which was one reason, besides her beauty, why she was much sought as well as feared. Her name was Adèle Hunter. She had been decidedly the most admired girl in society for two years—ever since she came out—and the young man who came up to her as the waltz ended was Ferdinand West, her admirer-in-chief.

"I cannot conceive how I missed you," he said as he collected the bou-

quets which she had laid down while dancing: "I had been looking for you since eleven."

"You were looking at something else when I came in."

"I am so fond of looking at a ballroom in a mirror: it makes the whole thing such a vision, *mirage*. Come down and let me show you the effect: it is unusually pretty to-night."

"I saw it when I came into the room: it reflects the door, so that I wondered you didn't see us coming in, as you were looking that way." She would not let him up, but she took his arm and moved away from the group of young men who had already formed about her. "You have looked at yourself enough for this evening."

"How hard you are upon me! It was misfortune enough to miss you and lose that waltz," he murmured.

"My misfortune entirely, but your fault."

"You never will understand me. If I did not see you it was because I was thinking of you too intently. I was thinking how much more I want of you than a dance."

"I fancy I understand you pretty well," she returned in the same ironical tone, but with a half sigh, which escaped him. "But don't let us talk about ourselves: it is too exciting for a ballroom. Let us talk about other people."

They were passing two rather remarkable-looking girls. Neither had regular beauty: in fact, one, notwithstanding many "points," was plain, but endued with style from head to foot; the other, though less striking, was much prettier, and had an attraction which was felt by every man the moment she entered a room. They were both beautifully dressed: their hands were full of flowers and they were hedged in by men.

"How well Miss Searle and Miss Silliman are looking to-night!" said Ferdinand.

His companion turned her head negligently and glanced at them: "They always look the same to me—like a pug and a pig."

Ferdinand bit his lip, but it was with annoyance, not amusement: he was vexed, because these young ladies were what he called his particular friends. One of them had been the object of his special attention before he knew his present companion, and he fluttered about them both with considerable animation when she was not to be approached. He had flattered himself more than once that he had excited her jealousy of them, but her comparison was so carelessly contemptuous that it deprived him of any such satisfaction; and, unfortunately, it was true. Miss Searle had a short, snub face and bullet head: even her handsome white teeth and dark brows did not lessen the resemblance. Miss Silliman's profile, although delicate, was slightly porcine: her receding chin disappeared in a lovely smooth throat, and her sleek skin and full figure were the envy of many a girl, but there was no forgetting that fatal facial angle when it had been brought to notice. Miss Hunter was sorry the moment she had uttered this unpleasant speech, which, in spite of her careless manner, did not arise from mere indifference: she was not addicted to saying disagreeable things about other women, and this sounded coarse, which she was not. Nobody could liken her to a beast of the field: the only object in animated Nature which her head recalled, even distantly, was that of a falcon or sparrowhawk, but the curves of her cheek and chin were too round to suggest anything sharp or beak-like. She would have liked to recall her words at the moment: in after times she remembered them with wicked gratification. She was too much provoked with herself, and Ferdinand was too much provoked with her, for either of them to speak again immediately, and before they broke silence their walk brought them to where Mrs. Hunter sat among wallflowers and chaperons. Behind her sat a man who was neither young nor handsome, yet whose name had been asked twenty times since he came into the room: this was partly because he was a stranger, partly because he was a noticeable person. His clothes were unmistakably English: the ease with which he wore them made various

people set him down as a foreigner. He had too much affability for an Englishman, however, and too much repose for a Frenchman: those who could not find out who he was settled that he must be a diplomatist from Washington who had polished away his national peculiarities in legations and embassies. He rose and offered his chair to Miss Hunter. After a transient wavering, which did not escape his eye, she withdrew her hand from Ferdinand's arm and dropped into the seat. Her mother, a pretty, easy-going, middle-aged woman, introduced Ferdinand to Mr. Atherton of Charleston.

"You are one of the managers, Mr. West, aren't you? You must let us congratulate you: it is the most beautiful assembly we have ever had."

During these few words the men had shaken hands, and Ferdinand was wondering how he could get the address of the other's tailor, while Mr. Atherton was taking in his new acquaintance's physical perfections, the litheness of his tall figure, the chiselled regularity of his features, the warm bronze of his hair—even the beautiful setting of his full blue eyes, the arch of his moustache and the way in which the small ears were placed, which gave to his whole person the completeness and finish of a statue.

"What have you been doing since the last dance, Adèle?" asked her mother, apparently for the sake of saying something.

"Helping Mr. West practise my favorite virtue, self-denial."

"In yourself or others, Miss Hunter?" inquired Mr. Atherton in a cool, cynical voice.

Her eyebrows went up a degree at the outer corners, and her smile was a little satanic, as she answered: "In others—I warn you."

The gentleman smiled in return, with a look of amused intelligence.

Two or three young men had come up to Miss Hunter the moment she sat down. West, like most men, did not care to be one of a circle round the woman of his preference, and he abhorred what is called general conversation, in which Miss Hunter's quick wit and words flashed in every direction: he was not ready at rejoinder, although he had a fluency at times which persuaded him that if the days of great speeches were not over, he should be a famous orator. Other men thought that his speeches would be better when he had got over the habit of schoolboy declamation which had made him the favorite speaker on examination-days. It is but fair to both parties to add that he was aware of a gift which his own sex could not estimate: in *tête-à-tête* with women he had an enthusiasm and a fervor in talking about himself or in making love of which his personal beauty greatly heightened the eloquence. His perfect reliance on himself in this respect gave him a range of expression, attitude and gesture which most men eschew for fear of seeming affected or ridiculous: it certainly raised his love-making very much above the every-day level. He soon grew impatient of merely helping to form Miss Hunter's court, and with a somewhat excessive show of courtesy proposed to present Mr. Atherton to some of the young ladies. The latter bowed assent and followed Ferdinand, who, a little surprised at his leaving Miss Hunter so readily, took him up to Miss Searle and Miss Silliman, still sitting together on a divan. The introduction caused a small stir in the group, and Mr. Atherton took his place beside Miss Searle, dispossessing a couple of other men without the least apparent rudeness or consciousness. Ferdinand was struck by the marked interest with which both young ladies turned toward the stranger, in whom he himself saw nothing remarkable except his dress.

"How handsome Mr. West is!" exclaimed Miss Silliman involuntarily as he moved off: then, a little confused at her own enthusiasm, she added, "Don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Atherton, looking after him: "I think he is the handsomest man I ever saw in this country."

"Are they handsomer abroad?" asked the young lady.

"Not handsomer, perhaps."

then?" inquired Miss Searle
rt of snap.
looking, possibly."
is the matter with Mr. West?"
Miss Silliman anxiously. "I
e was almost perfect: he told
:lf that his figure was in the
portions of perfect symmetry,
at he was a very little over
d his hands and feet were too

arle, who was not stupid, turn-
with a smile that wrinkled her
showed all her white teeth:
you so himself?—What have
y now, Mr. Atherton?"
:er smiled very slightly at Miss
artless remark: "I should say
o perfect—perhaps a trifle ef-
'

lliman looked distressed, but
:. Miss Searle's brow pucker-
id not like to hear Ferdinand
minate, and she was not afraid
"Mr. West is a good swimmer
:r: he saved a man's life last
the ice. I don't think him
:."
ertainly not—only his hands
replied Mr. Atherton with the
quil manner and little smile.
lliman felt uncomfortable, and
to change the conversation:
ɔes Mr. Hughes, Miss Hunter's
ıt admirer."
earle gave her a quick warn-
:, but Mr. Atherton looked com-
fter the man who was crossing
with only as much interest as
the speaker demanded: "Ah?
contrasts."
lughes is what we call a self-
ı: you have not many of that
e South, have you? You don't
ıem, I mean."
you mean men who have only
ıey, Miss Silliman. Some men
nselves in other ways."
ughes has done both: he has
:ollection of pictures in town,
ill go to Congress next year,"
Searle.
Hughes the Free-Soiler, is he?"
Atherton with some curiosity.

"Yes, but you can't care to hear about these men," said Miss Searle. "What shall we talk about to you?"

"About the women, if you please."

Meanwhile, Miss Hunter had been dancing. Supper was announced, and Mr. Atherton was at hand to wait upon Mrs. Hunter. Days before, Ferdinand had obtained Adèle's promise to go down with him, but now she declined to leave the ballroom and took a seat near a window, requesting him to bring her nothing but an ice and a glass of champagne.

He remonstrated: "It is not enough: you have danced several times already, and you have the German to go through."

"I shall not stay for the German to-night."

"Not stay?" he repeated in a voice of the deepest chagrin. "You promised me a month ago. I have been looking forward to this dance all winter. It is unfair, unjust: you have no right to deprive me of my partner at the last moment."

"Oh you will have no trouble about a partner: you have only to throw your handkerchief, you know." Her eyes and cheeks were unnaturally bright: her voice, though not loud, had a metallic ring, as if from suppressed anger or overwrought nerves. Her companion, absorbed in his grievances, did not notice these symptoms.

"For weeks I have been living on the thought of this pleasure, this long pleasure, of dancing with you three hours to this delicious music, and you snatch it from me without a word of explanation. It is worse than caprice, it is cruelty. Heaven knows there are not so many happy hours in a man's life that a woman should shorten them for a whim!" He spoke in a tone of passionate reproach.

She looked up at him and saw the intense disappointment in his face: her own relaxed and softened. "It is not a whim," she said more gently. "I do not want to dance the German to-night. I have a reason. I will tell you if you will come and see me to-morrow morning. Now I will join my mother and go, for I see she has come up from supper."

"I will put you into your carriage."

"No, it is not worth while, and I had rather not: Mr. Atherton is with us." She got up and took his arm: he pressed her hand against his side, and she felt his heart beat. She leaned on him a little as she crossed the room, and neither spoke again except to say good-night.

He had no difficulty in finding a partner: he was the best dancer as well as the handsomest man; he had an elastic strength which the young ladies declared made him the perfection of a partner. Miss Searle—who had the insolence of a belle of twenty-five years ago, when it was the men that ran after the women, and not *vice versâ*—threw over the gentleman to whom she had promised the cotillon, but contrived to do it without provoking a quarrel between him and Ferdinand. As they took their places Mrs. Hunter and her daughter were visible for a second as they passed along the corridor attended by Mr. Atherton.

"That's an engagement, I suppose?" said Miss Searle.

"An engagement?" ejaculated West.

"Why, you know his attentions to her were all the talk at Newport last summer, but his wife was still alive then, and it was thought that stood in the way."

"His wife?" he repeated again, stupefied and bewildered.

"Yes, he was a *divorcé*, don't you know? I believe they were separated for nearly ten years. She died early in the autumn, about six months ago. Didn't you notice how late they came and how early they went, and how excited Adèle Hunter seemed? She never lost a German before—so few chances as there are, too. Why don't they have them at private houses? But what's the use of telling you all this? Of course you are in the secret."

At this moment she was called out, and her partner had an opportunity of recovering himself before she returned; but the alteration and agitation of his countenance were so evident that Miss Searle gave him one searching glance, and then did not speak again, partly from sulkiness, partly from sympathy.

After each of them had taken several turns he said in an undertone, "Tell me all you know about this affair."

In spite of her jealousy, she was sorry for him, and her manner was gentler than usual as she answered: "I only know what I have told you, and what everybody could see as well as I. Maybe there's nothing in it."

"He is a terrible *mauvais sujet*, the men say."

"So I hear, but we don't mind that: in fact, most of us rather like it."

"What did you think of him? You had some conversation with him."

"He doesn't say much, but somehow he amuses and flatters one: he is very gentlemanly, a complete man of the world, and there is something fascinating about him."

"Not his looks, surely."

"Not his *good* looks, but there's something."

"He cannot be young."

"Not very—nearer forty than thirty. Leila Silliman said he was old, but he doesn't seem old—only not young."

"He's very rich, I believe."

"He looks so."

There was a pause in which they were called out: when they returned to their places he said, "She has led me on like an *ignis fatuus* for two years, to leave me in a slough at last."

Maud Searle had her own wrongs and griefs, and if she cared for poetical justice here it was, but few people care to be avenged by a rival. She liked Ferdinand still, and her resentment struggled with her preference and with a woman's desire to console. "Perhaps you are not the real victim," she said. "Perhaps she is leading somebody else a dance for a change."

He brightened at the suggestion: on the whole, it was incredible that Mr. Atherton, whatever his advantages, should have superseded him.

"You women understand each other better than we understand you. I should like to tell you some passages there have been between Miss Hunter and myself, and ask you what you think of them."

Strong curiosity to know how far mat

ters had gone between them was added to Miss Searle's other feelings: she nodded acquiescence, and in the pauses of the cotillon he related the vicissitudes of his relations with Adèle. But a craving for sympathy and counsel was mingled with another necessity of his nature, that of making himself a sentimental hero to the woman to whom he was talking; so that he did not lay as much stress on the discouragement he had received as on the admissions of regard which he had obtained, and Maud Searle's heart was heavy as she said at the end of his story that she thought he need not despair. He was cheered by this view of the case, but he had a counteracting consciousness of not having put the circumstances in their true light—not at least in broad daylight.

Round the supper-table after the cotillon Miss Hunter's engagement was the chief topic among the men: nobody knew it as a fact—everybody had heard of it. Robert Hughes was there: he looked grave, but said nothing. Ferdinand remarked that Atherton had no looks.

"What are looks?" said an ugly fellow. "You know what Wilkes said—"

"Yes, well enough, but it proved nothing. One hears a great deal of the handsome men of this world, more than one does of Wilkes. How much should we know of Alcibiades and Mark Antony and Villiers duke of Buckingham if they had not been handsome? Pitt was as remarkable for his appearance as for his powers. Byron owed at least his personal success to his personal beauty."

"He has looks enough for a man who isn't a genius," said Hughes: "ladies don't want average men to cut them out on their own ground." The other men smiled.

"But he's such an infernally fast fellow!" said one of them. "She's a reckless girl, but would she risk it?"

"That settles it," said Hughes, dryly: "they all like that sort. If her father were alive, it might be different, but women either don't know or don't care."

The next morning Adèle took care to be alone. Her deep color of the previous evening had vanished: she was pale—an unusual thing for her—but her eyes were brilliant and restless. When the ring for which she was waiting came at the street-door the blood rushed to her cheeks and she stood up eagerly, but it ebbed back and she sat down again. Ferdinand came in, looking pale too: he had slept badly, and had searched vainly for a becoming cravat that morning: the startling fact that for the first time in his life no color suited him convinced him that he was looking and feeling ill. Adèle saw that he had heard something about her affair. He bowed without speaking and sat down.

She began hurriedly: "You know why I asked you to come? You know the reason I spoke of last night?"

"I suppose," he replied with a great effort, "that you are engaged."

"I was not engaged last night: I have written a letter this morning accepting Mr. Atherton."

"Why did you bring me here? You know what this news is to me."

"What is it to you?" she asked, half scornfully, half eagerly.

"The deathblow of my hopes, the deepest grief of my life, the ruin of my happiness." He closed his eyes and bent his head upon his breast.

She flushed and paled: "Nobody knows of this yet but yourself, not even my mother. I wished you to hear it from me, and to be the first."

"Thank you," he replied bitterly, "but your secret is so generally suspected that I heard it openly discussed last night at the assembly."

"I am not responsible for the gossip of which I am the subject," she returned haughtily. "You knew as much about it as anybody there."

"I knew *nothing* about it," he replied impetuously: "I have never heard you mention that man's name. I believed that if I had not your love, I had your friendship and confidence—you have told me so more than once—and this has been going on half a year, and I had no more idea of it than of his being engaged to my own sister. Everybody knows more than I."

"If you had come to Newport last

summer you would have seen what everybody else saw."

Instead of going to Newport he had taken his holiday at Sharon, where the Sillimans were spending the summer.

"If I had been at Newport I should not have allowed my faith in you to be shaken by seeing you accept the attentions of a married man."

The color flew into her face and her eyes flashed: "You might have learned a lesson of good taste from a man who never breathed a word of love to me while he was bound even by the shadow of a tie to another woman. He has let half a year pass without giving a sign, that there might be no reflection upon me."

"I admire his delicacy," he began in the same tone of bitterness, but broke off and said earnestly, "But do you know this man's character? Do you know why his wife left him? Do you know that no high-spirited woman can live with him—that he is the first *mauvais sujet* in the country?"

She turned her eyes away: "You forget that I told you I had accepted him."

"Oh, I cannot believe it!" he exclaimed. "You said that your mother does not know it yet: it is not too late to withdraw. Think, think what you are doing! Have you once considered what marriage is? Do you love this man, whom you have only known with such a barrier between you?"

"I have seen in Mr. Atherton only what might inspire any woman with love," she replied evasively. "He has never mentioned his wife to me, only to my mother: he has not alluded to his grievances, which he must have had as well as she. He is the first man that has asked me to marry him who I felt loved me and whom I felt I might love."

"That is a cruel stab. I cannot help it that you have not been able to love me: I believe you would have loved me in time—you thought so once yourself—but you cannot have thought that I did not love you."

"I cannot have thought that?" she returned with sparkling eyes. "How was it the first winter I knew you, when after six months of dancing, visits, flowers and devotion, I found that you had been all the while half engaged to another girl whose mourning prevented her going out?"

"Don't go back to what really belonged to a time before I had ever seen you."

"I will go back no further than last night. I had promised you the first waltz after I came, and I said I should come about eleven. You cared so little about it that you let it slip through your fingers: you were so absorbed in looking at yourself in the glass that you let me pass by you."

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed, getting up and walking up and down the room, "you measure my love, my undivided thought of you for two years, against a moment's preoccupation! You are talking of trifles when the happiness of my whole life—of yours, perhaps—is at stake."

She looked up at him: his eyes met hers with a despairing appeal. Every line in his face took strength from his inward struggle and gained a more masculine beauty. A violent irresolution was apparent in her expression, in her very attitude, but he did not perceive it. He came and sat down on the sofa and held out his hands to her: she closed hers upon them with the repressing clasp with which one sometimes takes a child's. He shook: it was the first time he had ever held her hand except in dancing, and in a moment the thought of giving her up grew tenfold more intolerable—grew impossible.

She began in a voice which thrilled him as if he had been strung with wire: "Ever since I met you I have cared for you more than for any man I have ever known: I told you so a year ago. When I told you that, I did not love you: I tell you now that if I have not loved you it is because I have seen you could not love me—that you cannot love at all. No man has ever been so much to me, but you do not give enough: I must have more—I must have everything."

"What more can any man give you than his whole heart and soul?" he cried.

suddenly let go his hands and
: it was such an abrupt farewell
e dropped his head on the back
sofa with a stifled groan. She left
om without a word. He sat there
ıless, crushed. All was over, then:
lendid, wayward, passionate crea-
vho had so often seemed on the
of surrender, whom in his heart he
unted as his own, was gone, lost!
ears of fond hopes, blissful inter-
, happy dreams half realized, were
nd, and with them the object and
of existence ceased. He did not
now long he sat there—it seemed
time—when he heard a foot on
irs. He was afraid it might be
Iunter or a servant coming into
om, and he wished to escape un-
He took up his hat and turned
nically to the glass. His hair had
over his forehead, his dress looked
hat discomposed: he hastily drew
irf straight, pushed his hair back,
om mere force of habit stroked his
iche, when the door opened and
stood on the threshold with a let-
her hand, her face transfigured
owing. He started round like a
etected in a crime. The expres-
f her face changed as if from an
: shock; the flush died from her
and the light from her eyes; her
s settled into rigidity. She closed
or, came forward and flung the let-
the table, then moved to the fire-
where he was still standing, rather
il and conscious figure.
w you have ended the strife," she
in icy tones, yet with uncontrolla-
petuosity of manner, "and I have
ik you—yes, to thank you with my
heart—for saving me from making
of myself. Here I was, actually
ded that you loved me, that you
inhappy, that I was doing you
that I owed you something." Her
ence increased. "I was going to
y debt with my life. Here is the
wrote to Mr. Atherton. I had not
: I put off sending it until I had
ou, for I thought—I did not know
r—" Her voice broke, but she re-
d herself instantly: "But I know
now: it took you exactly as long to get
over my loss as it took me to find my
letter: somebody had moved the box in
which I had locked it up. I brought it
down that we might burn it together,
and I find you standing on the very
hearth where I thought we would watch
its flames, smoothing your moustache to
go and call on Miss Searle. I have been
told that men don't like to be offered
friendship by girls who refuse them, so
I won't offer you mine, but you will al-
ways have my gratitude. Good-bye."

Ferdinand had made more than one
attempt to interrupt her, but she check-
ed him by a gesture: now, with a fare-
well motion of her hand which forbade
hope, she again left the room, and he
felt that it was final.

CHAPTER II.

WITH Adèle's marriage she disappear-
ed from Ferdinand West's horizon. Now
and then he heard a report about her—
that she was leading a gay life in Charles-
ton, that she had been at Newport or Sar-
atoga during the summer or spending the
autumn in New York, conspicuous and
admired wherever she went; but their
paths never crossed. Her mother and
sister sometimes went to her, but to her
old home she never came. It was long
before Ferdinand ceased to think of her
his heart was wounded and his vanity
sore. He had a tendency to sentiment-
al melancholy arising in part from an
absence of constitutional vigor: physical
depression with him often outlasted the
moral cause of it, but he mistook the one
for the other. The uncertainty which had
pervaded his intercourse with Adèle, their
indefinite position toward each other—al-
ways more than friends, always less than
lovers—had been so tantalizing and stim-
ulating that he missed the excitement as
he would have missed a dram. He wore
so pensive a countenance that he was
pronounced to be more irresistible than
ever. He took some comfort in his in-
timacy with Maud Searle, with whom he
used to talk of his unhappiness by the
hour. She had a sort of blunt original-

ity which amused him: she was what is now called "a good fellow," and she dressed perfectly. The winter after Adèle's marriage they were generally supposed to be engaged, or on the point of becoming so, but spring came, and it was the same old story. She supported the position of confidante with firmness until one day she found that Leila Silliman shared it with her. Then her patience gave out, and shortly after this discovery Ferdinand was rudely surprised by a note from her announcing her engagement to Mr. Hughes. This was a new shock—he had begun to think he might marry Miss Searle himself some day—but it did him good, for it piqued and roused him. After this he thought less often of Adèle: he put more energy into his profession, and embarked on a lively cruise of flirtation among young girls and married women, which helped to restore his spirits entirely.

Five years after Miss Hunter's marriage the civil war broke out. Her mother wrote urging her and her husband to come at once and stay with her until the trouble should have blown over, which, the good woman heard from the best authority, would be by autumn at the latest. Adèle replied by bidding her mother a long farewell: Mr. Atherton had no sympathy with North or South; he considered the war a foolish business on both sides, but predicted that it would be a long one, and said that he should take his wife and child to Europe until it was over. They sailed immediately from New Orleans. By and by vague rumors came from Nice and Florence that Mr. Atherton had gone back to his old ways, and that Mrs. Atherton was known in foreign society as *La belle rebelle*, and was a good deal talked about. Only those who had a particular interest in her paid much heed to these stories: there were other things to think about.

At the beginning of the war, Ferdinand, who did not profess the worship of abstract ideas, proclaimed that it was a great mistake not to let the South go, and that he, for one, would have no hand in keeping her against her will. Later, when reverses and losses had changed the temper of the North, there was a moral pressure upon young men who had nobody dependent upon them to take the places of the well-beloved who had rushed forward in the first ranks and fallen there. Ferdinand had disagreeable things said to him by men, and even by women, and he found that with the latter any fellow who came home on sick leave had an advantage over him. Popularity was a boon which he had never possessed or coveted, but he was accustomed to a species of prominence, an agreeable separateness, which he was not willing to exchange for a disagreeable one. He did not value his life unduly, but he prized extremely all that gave it worth to him: being killed outright would be a small matter to him compared to the loss of a limb or a front tooth. He thought he should not mind a noble scar, but as he scanned himself in the glass he was unable to decide on which part of his face he should least object to having it. There were other considerations: he was beginning to succeed to his father's business as a real-estate lawyer; he had established a name for integrity and honor which was worth as much as ability would have been to him; his affairs, though not positively flourishing, prospered steadily, and he did not wish to neglect his own interests for a chimera. He was past thirty, and, besides being naturally self-indulgent, he was acquiring that dislike of any derangement of his comfort or departure from his habits which seems no longer peculiar to old bachelors. Nevertheless, the strain tightened, and on counting the cost he decided that it would be less annoying to go than to stay at home. He tried to get up a cavalry regiment, having a vision of himself leading a charge, but failed, and had to come down to a captaincy. Through Leila Silliman's influence he was soon transferred to her father's staff, and one day, when bullets were hot, he had his horse killed under him as he was carrying a message to the corps commander. He disliked rough walking, so he got hold of a mule and despatched his errand on that. An important movement depended on the message, and Ferdinand

got his brevet for bringing it through so promptly. This was his last experience of active service. After three months on the Rappahannock he had a sharp touch of intermittent fever, which left him with a cough. He now felt that he had done enough for his country, his character and his position in the community. He went to the surgeon and stated his case: he thought his lungs were affected, and wanted his discharge as unfit for service. He explained his symptoms minutely and dwelt strongly upon the fact of a predisposition to pulmonary complaint in his family. The surgeon percussed him and auscultated him, felt his pulse and looked down his throat, then said encouragingly, "I don't find much the matter with you."

"Not much, but I'm not perfectly sound, eh?"

"H'm! no, not as good as new, perhaps: few men of thirty-five are."

"With my constitutional tendencies, that can end but one way if I keep on here, especially if we don't go into winter quarters again this year. I sha'n't be any good."

"No," replied the surgeon, eying him humorously, "I don't think you'll be much good: why don't you resign?"

"I don't wish to resign."

The surgeon, though sharp, was a good-natured fellow, and gave him a certificate—"lungs threatened"—on which Ferdinand got an honorable discharge and went home. His record was considered good: he had gone into the army at much past the usual age, had had his horse shot under him, and after a year's service had come out a major with his health broken. None but the over-exacting expected more of any man; still, it was not brilliant, and he perceived that his prestige was diminishing. He thought that the women were infatuated about anybody who had a scratch or a sling, but he forgot that society had passed into the hands of a set of girls who were children when he burst upon the scene—that they inclined to their own friends with whom they had grown up, and looked upon him as belonging to an earlier period. There was one person in whom he found no change, Leila Silliman. She too was not so young as once, but, though a little too plump, she was prettier than ever, and still had partners, flowers and sugar-plums *ad libitum:* the younger as well as the older set admired her; she was by no means as silly as formerly, and had unlimited tact; she was not precisely a flirt, but had a universal desire to please men, and they were all pleased. Ferdinand sometimes asked himself whether he could do better than marry Leila: she was an only child, and would be well off, and she was one of those women in whom the *ewige weibliche* is constantly presenting conjugal pictures and perspectives in the softest colors: a man who thought about her at all inevitably thought of her as a sweetheart and wife. The difficulty with Ferdinand lay in its being so different a marriage from any he had contemplated: his visions had always been of a great beauty or a great heiress, or of an exceptional, extraordinary girl like Adèle Hunter. Maud Searle had been none of these, but she was very striking, and decidedly a *person*, which poor Leila was not. This seemed too tame, too much in the common order of things, for a man like himself. Nevertheless, he was beginning to find life flat and tedious: his profession prevented his going abroad. Marriage was at least a great change, a new point of departure: he wondered whether it was not the best thing when a man had come to a certain age.

In this frame of mind he called upon Leila one evening on his way to a party to which she was not going.

"I wish you were to be there," he said. "I don't know what takes me: you are the only woman who interests me in society. I've a great mind to turn hermit."

"And live in the desert?" she asked with the affectionate smile and gaze which always aroused masculine tenderness.

"'With one fair spirit for my minister.' Will you come and try it?"

She shook her head: "You would not like it long."

"I have never liked anything long," he said, getting up and pacing the room,

"nor enough: that is the secret of my life. If I had loved Adèle Hunter enough, she would have married me: she was afraid at every step, and I believe in my soul she married that man to save herself from me. She did the best thing for both of us—for me, undoubtedly. She was not truly feminine: there was something hard and unwomanly about her, which was certain to increase as time went on. A man does not want to rest his head on a stone all his life, even if it be marble or agate. Adèle would not have made me happy—I should not have made her happy: it is better as it is."

Leila sat listening with oppressed breathing, for Ferdinand had never said this before. She had been the confidante of a number of men, as well as the object of several suits, and she knew by experience that men are ever ready to sacrifice the memory of a past love at a new shrine. She was incapable of knowledge of human nature, but she understood the other sex by instinct; and if she did not go far enough to perceive that this sacrifice is not so much an offering to the new idol as an immolation to the man's own vanity, and a solace if his passion has been unsuccessful, she recognized the symptom and grew chilly with expectation.

Ferdinand went on: "I am not unhappy about her any longer: that is past, dead and buried. But I want an object in life, and what is there? What is success at the bar? mere money-making. It has sunk to the level of a trade like the other professions: there is no personal distinction any more. If any man could win fame in that way, I should have had it long ago, but the thing does not exist any more. If I had gone into business instead, I might have been a millionaire like Bob Hughes, but what then? What has his money done for him except buy Miss Searle, whom I might have had without the money? I would have stayed in the army, in spite of my health, if that could have led to anything: I rose so fast that I dare say I should have held out till I got to the top of the ladder. But when this war is over what would military position amount to? It does not give rank as in England, nor influence as in France: there is nothing but to get scalped by Indians or catch the fever in a Southwestern fort. I should not like to be scalped," he added, smiling at her as he passed his hand over his burnished, copper-colored locks: he looked divinely handsome.

She smiled back fondly: "I should have envied the Indian that got that hair."

"You may have it all, hair and head, if you will," he replied in the same tone, sitting down beside her and bending the ambrosial mass above her knees.

Her heart beat, but she struck the curls a light blow with her feather fan and answered, "You forget you are going to have it shaved and turn hermit."

He got up again and walked back and forth, as he liked to do, for it displayed his figure and enabled him to use gestures. "Give me a career," he resumed, extending his hand palm upward, "or give me an aim. There is no romance in these times, there are no adventures: no man of this century will leave a name like that of Mark Antony or the duke of Buckingham, who made war or peace that they might see the women they loved: there would be no arena even for Count d'Orsay now-a-days.—There is ten o'clock. I must go to my party. It is to be early."

"Stay a little longer," she pleaded: "you said you didn't care about it." She could not let the propitious hour slip away without making a clutch at it.

"Do you know how you can make me care about it? You can make it delightful to me."

"How can I? You know I will do it."

"Come with me and give me the German."

"Oh, how could I do that? I have declined; I am not dressed; the coachman must have gone home; mamma is probably in bed."

"As to your having declined, the Browns will be all the more glad to see you; you can go and tell Mrs. Silliman, who knows I will take good care of you;

and while you are dressing I will call a carriage from a livery-stable: your hair looks like satin and doesn't need a touch, and I am told that is the longest part of a lady's toilette. Come, now, I know you can be ready in half an hour."

She would much rather have kept him there to herself another half hour, but she did not feel sure that he would stay. She was always disposed to do what a man asked her, and she knew that he was one of those with whom a woman gains more by yielding to and humoring than by piquing them. She looked up with her sweet smile: "What nonsense! but if I thought it would really make a difference—"

"It will make all the difference," he said warmly. "I must go, for I promised Mrs. Brown particularly. Now, do come."

"See how good I am," she said, rising. "I will be ready in half an hour."

Ferdinand went out and ordered a carriage, and then, not without trouble, got a magnificent bouquet for Miss Silliman. He was walking up and down her drawing-room, occasionally casting a glance at himself in the long mirror, when she came in with her white burnous on her arm. Her dress was exceedingly becoming—it made her look slighter than usual—and her neck and shoulders were lovely: her appearance filled Ferdinand with complacency at the thought of entering the room with her on his arm. She was not calm: the hasty resolve and dressing had ruffled her habitual placidity; the thought of the drive alone with Ferdinand produced a delicious perturbation; the sense of her own charms reacted upon herself like mild intoxication; and Ferdinand's beauty and attraction had never so overpowered her before. Everything heightened her presentiment of a crisis.

Ferdinand came toward her with his large eyes full of admiration: "You never looked so lovely in your life, and the flowers are not worthy of you."

"How kind of you to bring them!" she said, holding out her fat little white hand for them.

"Won't you give me one for my coat?" She picked out the most perfect bud. "Won't you fasten it in for me?" He moved close to her, and bent over her as she fastened in the flower with unsteady fingers.

"My glove makes me so clumsy," she faltered. "There!" But as her hands dropped from the lapel of his coat she trembled to such a degree that he put his arm about her to support her. She sank softly into a low chair: he knelt beside her, still holding her embraced, and laid his head upon her velvety shoulder, which was certainly like neither marble nor agate.

"You have been my sole consolation," he said tenderly: "you are the only thing that makes life worth keeping. Will you take my life for your love?"

She did not speak, faint with bliss. He drew off a magnificent solitaire diamond, the fruit of his first large fee, which he wore as men generally do a seal ring, and slipped it on her third finger. The ring was too large, and even at that moment of genuine emotion he had a twinge of vexation that his little-finger ring should be too large for any woman's hand. "We must keep it on with another," he said. And so they were betrothed.

CHAPTER III.

THE war had been over for nearly a year, and life had returned to its old grooves, when Ferdinand West found on the hall-table one day an invitation to a dinner-party for the morrow. Mrs. Brown, the hostess, apologized frankly for the informality of the proceeding, owning that he was asked to fill the place of a gentleman who had deserted her, carrying off his wife at the same time: she made an appeal to his friendliness, and added that she could offer as an inducement the beautiful Mrs. Atherton of Charleston, of whom he must have heard. Nothing less than such a temptation would have prevailed with Ferdinand to act as a substitute; but he had no little curiosity to see his old flame and how the years had dealt with her. He dressed himself with more care than usual—if that is possible when a man always dresses with the utmost care—and surveyed himself with honest pride.

"I doubt her having worn as well," was his mental comment. On general principles he was likely to be wrong: dark people have the advantage over light ones when the first bloom is past. He was still the handsomest man in society, but he was not so handsome as he had been ten years before: there was a loss of brightness, freshness, buoyancy, with no compensating gain. His first look showed him that Mrs. Atherton had lost nothing, at least in positive good looks. Her figure and face were fuller, a decided improvement; there was the same richness and brilliancy of coloring; her carriage was more commanding; the hackneyed epithet of queenly was often applied to her, but she had not royal repose enough for that. The countenance had changed for the worse: it was haughty and defiant; the smile was splendid, but satanic. She was more attractive than in her girlhood, but it was in a different way. Ferdinand had rehearsed probable meetings with Mrs. Atherton a hundred times under all sorts of circumstances: it did not turn out in the least as he had expected. He bowed to her across the room while speaking to Mrs. Brown, and she returned the bow from her sofa with easy magnificence, and without interrupting her sentence, as if she had seen him the day before. When he had paid his respects to his hostess and learned whom he was to take to dinner, he went up to Mrs. Atherton and held out his hand: she gave him hers without rising, with a self-possessed nod which swept him a thousand miles further off from her and their old footing than her marriage and ten years' separation had done.

"How have you been all this time?" he asked with a smile which was meant to express that a studiously commonplace remark was a necessity of the occasion.

"Variously. You seem to have been always similarly."

"Oh no," he answered, huffed by her striking the satirical key at once. "*I* have had my fluctuations. Is Mr. Atherton here this evening?" looking round the room.

"No, he is not in town," she replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

He bowed, and moved on to the lady whom he was to take to dinner. But he found himself next Mrs. Atherton at table, and although he took pains to address very little of his conversation to her, he could not avoid hearing hers both to the master of the house on her other hand and to the gentleman opposite, who was immensely struck by her and constantly spoke to her. There was the same change in her voice as in her look: the hard, metallic sound which it used to have only when she was annoyed or over-excited was now never absent. There was something in her tone and manner which impressed him as artificial, and in her phrases and way

of speaking there was now and then, he thought, a theatrical turn. He could not analyze it, for she was devoid of affectation, but the effect was of a person acting a part consciously, yet without effort: it might be only the influence of foreign life and society. Whatever one's speculations about her might be, one might be sure that the surface was all that was seen or reached. As a girl she had inspired curiosity as to what she would turn out: now she set men wondering what she was and had been. Ferdinand watched, listened, speculated, until he became stirred up and restless. It was strange, so strange, to be sitting there beside her as if she were any other woman or he any other man. No wonder her speeches sounded theatrical: the whole combination was like a scene in a play. When the peculiar excitement produced by the mingled influence of memory and personal nearness takes possession of any one, it is almost impossible for him to realize that the person who is acting upon him in this way is not equally affected. While Ferdinand's recollections and associations were gradually waking up and kindling one by one, he could not conceive that Adèle remained unmoved: he felt that the emotion must be mutual—that she must be in an answering mood. At dessert he took up her bouquet of dark pansies which lay between them on the table: "Are these your favorite flowers still?"

"No: were they ever? I think I like carnations best now."

He was provoked by her not remembering about the pansies, but could not resist saying in a low voice, "It seems strange to be sitting here by you, as if nothing had ever happened or nothing had changed."

She turned her head with a look of surprise: "What has changed? That you were once in love with me, you mean? You are very good to remember it, so many things have happened since."

Ferdinand could not make up his mind whether this frank indifference were genuine or not, but it reminded him how many newer conquests between their parting and meeting must lie in her mind; and he was irritated at having shown interest enough to dig up an affair which evidently lay buried six deep with her, and quite forgotten. The triumphs had not all been on her side: he should like her to know that; and while he was meditating how he might renew the conversation so as to convey the information, he raised her bouquet to his face and looked over it at his opposite neighbor. She was a blond charmer, who had been deeply piqued by the inattention of her own cavalier; so she smiled at Ferdinand with a fine display of pearly teeth, and raising her bouquet returned his eye-fire across the roses. This was rather childish, but almost anything such handsome people do looks well, at least if they are young enough; which the lady was. One or two of the guests caught them peeping at each other, and laughed: at the same moment Mrs. Brown gave the signal for rising.

Mrs. Atherton held out her hand for her flowers, saying, "What a pity you are a man, Mr. West! There is the stuff of two pretty women in you."

Everybody who heard her laughed, the men a little uproariously: her own smile was simply infernal, Ferdinand thought, and if her sarcasm used to sting, it scalded now. He did not go near her for the rest of the evening, mentally resolved never to speak to her again.

The next morning, taking counsel of his vanity, he perceived that not to call upon so old an acquaintance would betray too much sensitiveness: he left a card for Mrs. Atherton at her mother's house, without asking if she were at home: that showed polite indifference. The evening of the same day nothing was going on. Ferdinand was smoking after dinner, undecided whether he should look in at the club or call on yesterday's lady of the roses, with whom he had an incipient flirtation dating from the previous evening. He had been haunted by the vision of Adèle all day long, and it took the edge off his desire to see

the other woman. Her beauty and brilliancy did not disturb him much, but he was filled with an uneasy curiosity to find out what sort of creature she had become — whether her new character was fictitious; how far she was changed; what was the history of her life. He was anxious, besides, not to seem to avoid her, as if he were not cured or feared new wounds: he had made two mistakes the evening before, and he was desirous of setting himself right. He asked himself what was the natural thing to do under other circumstances—what he should do, for instance, when Mrs. Bob Hughes came home. "Go and see her of course: drop in toward nine o'clock in the old way and ask about her travels." So, after defumigating and delicately perfuming himself, he went a second time to Mrs. Hunter's. As the street-door opened he heard music within, the piano and a female voice singing with considerable power and execution. He was annoyed, having hoped to find Mrs. Atherton alone, or, at any rate, without other visitors. He did not know the voice, and could not imagine whose it could be; and as he walked up stairs, the maid having left him to find his way, he prepared himself to meet a stranger, being certain that if any of his townswomen sang in that manner, he should have heard her before. To his astonishment, Mrs. Atherton rose from the piano, and they two were alone in the room.

"You sing?" he exclaimed, forgetting his preconcerted opening. "You didn't sing in old times."

"No: they found out in Paris that I had a voice, and I learned there."

She was a different creature from the night before: she was the old Adèle, but with an ampler development, a completer charm. She had become a woman of the great world: that was all. His guard dropped, and he sat down by her, smiling into her eyes as of old, and letting everything take its way.

"I am afraid that is not the only thing you learned in Paris."

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed, looking a little devilish, as her smile generally made her look now, but only the more fascinating: "You wouldn't have had me remain an *ingénue* all my life?"

"I never wished you to change."

"One must give up white muslin and bread-and-butter some time or other. In this country we always leave off our youth too soon or too late: abroad, one learns to grow old gracefully."

"Grow old? You have only grown up."

"It makes me feel old enough to see Blanche's children: she was a child herself when I left this house."

Her younger sister had married Dr. Kent, the surgeon who had given West his certificate: he now stood very high in his profession. They lived with Mrs. Hunter, and Ferdinand looked round anxiously, wondering how long his tête-à-tête would be unbroken. "Mrs. Kent is out this evening?" he inquired.

"She and her husband have gone to New York for a few days: he was telegraphed to assist at an important operation, and she went with him—an inseparable couple. My mother has been confined to her room all day, and has just fallen asleep."

Ferdinand expanded with contentment at the prospect of some unbroken hours. "That seems a very happy marriage," he observed.

"It is; and that is how I came to be at Mrs. Brown's last evening. The Kents were to dine there, and gave out at the last moment on account of this journey. Poor Mrs. Brown came to remonstrate: you know what an old friend she is. I had just arrived, and she took me as a substitute for Blanche."

"So I was substitute for Dr. Kent: you see our stars draw each other in their courses. I suppose there will be a round of parties for you?"

"Oh no. I never had many friends, you know, and I don't wish to go out: I wish to be perfectly quiet. I did not care for it yesterday, and I shall not accept any more invitations. That was for the honor of the family."

"You make a long stay, I hope?" He had no sooner pronounced these words than he felt how flat they were, and how

›etter suited to the end than the
ng of a visit.
xpected some sarcasm in reply,
only said, "I don't know: I came
ness." Her face grew hard and
and she was silent for a mo-
ıen resumed with a convention-
ıge of manner: "But where is
l this time? She was not with
: night."
oked at her with grave surprise,
not answer immediately, so that
not know what to expect. "Leila
" he said quietly—"more than
.rs ago."
can it be? Forgive me: I had
rd." She held out her hand to
ɜ raised it to his lips. They were
moment, a tribute of natural pie-
ɔr Leila's memory. Adèle spoke
ı subdued voice: "I never knew.
Iughes told me of your marriage
."
: we were married just before
got his mission. We went to
amas that winter for the climate,
died there."
I thought it was *your* health that
strong."
t was: I came out of the army
ough. But the voyage was very
ınd she suffered excessively, and
ıs a great alarm about the reb—
n cruisers: she was terrified and
ed, and did not rally after land-

ɾ sad! how sad! Two happy
ɾrenched apart, while how many
te each other drag through life,
together like galley-slaves! Tell
e of yourself."
aw that she wished to hear: he
ıscious of a fuller sympathy be-
hem than he had ever felt in the
s. It was very strange to be sit-
:re with her once more: the im-
ıs and sensations of the previous
were returning upon him with
force.
re is not much to tell. After
ıt away there was a long blank.
ɔearle was very good to me, but
:oo soon: her friendship helped
she resented my not forgetting.
She married in pique, but he is just the husband for her, and she makes him an excellent wife, and we are very good friends."

"She spoke of you like a friend in Paris: all I have known of you since I left here came through her. She told me of your having gone to the war."

"Yes, that was another episode. At first I did not take much interest in the question: I was opposed to keeping the South by force. After we lost so many brave fellows it became another matter: it was a plain duty and point of honor with every high-toned man to go. I went, and stayed until my health broke down. My general was very sorry to lose me; I was promoted for courage and conduct; I was known at the War Department; my discharge was worded in the most complimentary manner. You would have heard of me if I could have remained, but I was forced to retire, and am only a major, at your service."

She smiled seriously, listening in a sort of reverie. So he was a man, and she had done him injustice? It had an unspeakable charm to be once more in the familiar room, with him beside her talking of himself. He had matured; he was more than she had remembered him; and how handsome! How well she recollected the way in which his hair rippled off close to his left brow, showing the fine shape of the head, and rose in heavy waves on the other side, each dashed with brightness! As a girl she had fancied that his hair must be like Absalom's after the long locks were shorn from his princely head: she remembered the fancy now. A deep red spot burned on her cheeks and gave her eyes preternatural lustre: the feelings of her gay and thoughtless youth, with its hours of intense enjoyment, came back and rose over her like a spring tide. At first she let herself float with luxurious unresistance, but as the current gained strength she felt herself swept swiftly on above new depths.

He looked at her, wondering that she did not speak: her face was soft and dreamy. What was she thinking of? She was superb! glorious! Stimulated

by her beauty and the thronging memories of the past, he went on: "Then came a dull, flat, intolerable time. I grew sick of society, success, women, my profession—everything. There seemed nothing to live for: my health gave me hopes that I might not live long. Then came Leila, or rather there she was still, poor child! steadfast at my side. I saw that her happiness was bound up in me, and what poor happiness I have had came from her love. But it could not have lasted, even for her: she was disappointed from the first, and pined for what I could not give her. I have not an unkind or untender word to reproach myself with: her parents look upon me as a son to-day; they are devoted to me, and wished me to live with them, but I preferred going back to my father's house."

"And what do you look forward to?" she asked.

"To what, indeed? I stand as high in my profession as any man of self-respect can in these days who does not care to be a railroad or patent lawyer or solicitor to the Ring. I thought of going into politics merely for the excitement, but it is hard for a gentleman to come in contact with blackguards and scoundrels. I would not pay court to them, but there is a peculiar magnetism about some men which they felt: I should have got my nomination if it had not been for private jealousy on the part of a man who had influence with the roughs—one of the wire-pullers—and then I should certainly have been elected."

"Did he want the place himself?"

"No: he only wanted to keep me out of it. He took it into his head that I was hunting on his track, and that I was the cause of his being refused by a lady he wished to marry; and this was his noble revenge."

"And did you take none?" asked Adèle, with a gleam in her eye which showed she had not lived at the South for nothing.

"I did not care enough for either the woman or the place. A man who was *out in the war* can pass over things he *must have noticed* before."

"True," she assented.

"Sometimes I think I will throw up the whole thing and go and live abroad. How do you think I should like it? How did you like it?"

"There is a difference between a man's enjoyment of Europe and a woman's," she replied, laughing a little. "I liked it. There is so much variety—you see all sorts of people. Nice has not the best society in the world, nor Florence, nor Baden, yet I amused myself very much at them."

"Ah! *la belle rebelle?*"

"No, not that sort of thing only. I used to watch the old dowagers launching a novice or a *nouveau riche*, marrying all their young acquaintance, if they were clever talking to the famous men, mixing in politics and diplomacy; and I made up my mind one could have a good time there at any age: there is so much life in their existence one really lives every hour."

Ferdinand would have given a good deal to know exactly how much she meant by this, and what her share of life had been. "Tell me what to do with myself," he asked. "I could have achieved anything, been anything, with you; and since I have seen you again I feel a new impetus, as if I might still make something of my life. What shall I do?"

A deep flush overspread her face and her eyes clouded over. She rose abruptly: "Go abroad, go abroad, and enjoy yourself as men do."

Ferdinand's latent excitement sprang into a blaze: something in her action recalled the last time they had been together in that room, and he had a fear that she was going to leave him again. He caught her hand, the slim, strong hand which fitted his clasp as it had done that other day.

"I can't talk any more now," she said in a stifled voice.

"Are you tired? Shall I leave you?"

"No, no;" and her fingers tightened on his: then, forcing a smile, "but how shall I amuse you?"

"*Amuse* me? Great Heavens!" he exclaimed, but breaking off suddenly—"Can you sing for me? Will you?" She

. went to the piano, on which
s were burning. "What were
g when I came in? It sound-
fully moving, stirring. Will
hat?"

ıesitating a moment, with her
the keys and her eyes cast
in doubt; then struck a chord
and began Schumann's song:

ain, although my heart should break:
ever lost, I'll not complain.

ce was a powerful *mezzo so-*
h a metallic vibrating quality
of the sweeter brass instru-
had a peculiarly exciting ef-
e nerves, and she sang with
ibable intensity. The bitter,
row of the words, the rage of
: music, were like an outpour-
er own heart, and every sylla-
erated through Ferdinand as
a tympanum in the centre of
He leaned breathless on the
: piano, watching her moody
e soft, full candle-light, until
ıe passion of the music and
nt he was scarcely master of
When she ended he murmur-
!" almost inaudibly. He was
itated, and afraid to open his
: should break into a tempest
he went on with the next song:

rt wretched, yet I murmur not:
y love, we both will wretched be
ıur broken hearts at length sets free—
y love, we both will wretched be.

ıang the last words she got up
ɔiano with her arms hanging
her hands locked together,
ıxed on his. He made a sin-
ɔward her and caught her in
"Oh God, Adèle! what have
' What have you done to us

you warned me of in this room
ago: I have destroyed both
' She returned his kiss, and
lrawing herself, sat down upon
'Sit down by me and I will tell
am here." He sat down be-
palpitating with emotion, and
ıand, which she left in his.
; outwardly calm, and began
deliberately: "You told me
that no woman of spirit could live with Mr. Atherton a year: that was true, or nearly true. I have nominally lived with him for ten, but only the most determined effort of pride, and in some part the recollection of your words, have enabled me to do it. At first I was defiant and desperate. I made up my mind to amuse myself: it was some amusement to horrify the prudes of Charleston and take down the New York women. My little boy's death ended that: he was three years old. You knew that, Ferdinand?" He pressed her hand and inclined his head mutely: he had forgotten all about it. "Then came the war, and we went abroad. I hated Mr. Atherton more for his indifference about that than anything else: I could have forgiven everything if he had shown a spark of patriotism or enthusiasm or noble rage; but he has no more heart or soul or principle than a block."

"You were a great rebel?" he asked with a tender smile.

She nodded. "It waked me up from my sorrow. I used to think if I could go and fight and be killed, what a happy fate! But we went abroad, you know. There things became different in some respects, and my life was more bearable. Charleston is very respectable: if one wishes to be comfortable, one must observe external decency. Now, abroad, if you are willing to live in a certain world—what I should call the first circle outside of the best society—a man may do whatever he likes, and a woman nearly so. Also, if a man takes a certain line it is supposed that he and his wife have an understanding each to go their own way; and anything is overlooked in a woman so placed which does not offend appearances too glaringly. This suited me perfectly—much better than being patronized by the cream of Belgravia, who took us up because we were Southerners, or hanging on the skirts of the Faubourg St. Germain, or climbing in at the windows of the Tuileries. I wanted distraction, excitement; and I had them."

Ferdinand bent his head and looked into her eyes with intense interrogation.

She did not flinch, and went on proudly: "I did nothing that the world may not know, as you will presently see. I had opportunities of throwing myself away—what was left of me—if I had felt the temptation, but though I liked walking on the edge, I never felt dizzy. I was horribly unhappy sometimes, but I could have gone on for a long time on the mere outward enjoyment. There was constant change—Nice and Florence in winter, Paris in the spring, Baden and Hombourg and Trouville and Dieppe in summer. There is so much—the theatres, the opera, the races, an endless succession of diversions. I used to ask myself now and then what I should do when I was no longer *la belle rebelle*, and I always came to the conclusion that there were resources for every age in that state of society. One can live so pleasantly—on so little too, for the war cut our income down very much, in spite of Mr. Atherton's prudent Northern investments. I used to look forward to living abroad always, but he grew tired of it all at once. The truth is, he had drunk life down to the dregs long before, and now he had swallowed the last of it, dregs and all. The war was over, and he said he must come home and look after his property. This was like an earthquake to me: still, I was glad to think of seeing my mother and sister, for I supposed we should begin the old round again. I thought the defeat of the South had killed all my affection for my own country, but it was not wholly dead: I had some joy in seeing its shores again. But I found nothing was to be the same except Mr. Atherton's habits. Charleston was in ruins; our house there had been burned; people I really liked gave us the cold shoulder on account of what they termed our flight, and called us *émigrés*. Mr. Atherton announced his intention of living on the plantation: I wavered then whether to go or refuse, but could not bring myself to the final step; so I went with him six months ago. Well, I am not going to give you the catalogue of my wrongs: he deserves that at least of me: *personne ne lave son linge sale en famille* more scrupulously than he. My lawyer will know them when the time comes, for I cannot endure my existence any longer, and I am going to get a divorce."

Ferdinand started to his feet. "Good God!" he cried. She flashed a look upon him of so much angry inquiry that he checked himself in the midst of his excitement and sat down again; but when he tried to take back her hand, she drew it away, and, slightly crossing her arms, sat in an attitude of haughty reserve.

"Have you taken any steps?" he asked.

"No. I wished to consult my mother and sister, but as my mother was not quite well, and they were starting on this little journey, I put it off for a few days. Nobody, not a human being, knows of it yet but yourself."

He took her hand, half by force, and kissed it: the slender fingers pulsated against his and set his own pulses throbbing again.

"Do you expect any opposition from—from—" He could not bring himself to name her husband.

"Hardly: he hates a scandal, an *esclandre*—that is, noise and notoriety. He might oppose it on that ground, though it would come to the same thing in the end; and worse, as I should not shrink from a jury-trial if it had to come to that. He knows I have nothing to fear but the publicity: the exposure would be far worse than if he consented to have it privately settled."

"Then you *have* consulted a lawyer?"

"No, but I have been reading."

"Let me be your lawyer," he cried, "and I promise you that he shall be compelled to grant all that you wish without publicity or vexation to you: Adèle, let me be your adviser and champion."

She shook her head, and a deep blush overspread her face and throat, while with an action of girlish delicacy she turned her face away.

"Why not?" he whispered, and drew her to him until her head rested upon his breast: his heart swelled as if it would burst, but the tranquil expression of a happy child stole over her face.

She murmured, "Impossible!"

"Are you not willing to owe your freedom to me?"

"No, Ferdinand, for then I should not feel as if I were free."

"Surely, Adèle, you cannot suspect—you do not think me capable of exacting conditions?"

She raised her head proudly and looked at him: "No: no man could exact conditions of me."

"Why, then, my love, my dearest love?"

"If I owed it to you I should not feel that it were mine to bestow." He loosened his embrace and looked at her, and then strained her to his heart again. "You take my senses away with happiness. Oh, what a dream! what a rapture! what a delirium! The first, the only woman I ever loved! I call her by her name! I hold her in my arms! she will be mine after all these cruel years!"

The mantel-clock struck twelve. Adèle sat erect: "You must go."

"You will let me come to-morrow?"

"No. I mean to be prudent for the first time in my life. You have had nothing to do with my resolution, Ferdinand, and I must so order my conduct that nobody shall suppose that you had. I am sorry now that I did not speak to my family at once, before I saw you. You must not come again until I have had a conversation with them."

"But how long that will be! Adèle, think of the years you have robbed me of!"

"My sister comes home to-morrow night, and if my mother is well enough I will speak to them the next day."

"What do you think they will say?"

"I do not know. My mother was always averse to extreme measures: she is not strong any more. My sister would side with me entirely if it were not for her husband, but men have a horror of these things; and as I am not his own sister, I suppose he would rather I should endure everything than that the penumbra of a shadow should rest upon Blanche. He and I are strangers, and he has a prejudice against me, I can see, and will probably think I am half to blame."

"But you can justify yourself—you can tell him."

"I shall tell him nothing: I shall state my reasons to my mother and sister. The worst one never tells, but I have enough to satisfy a lawyer without that." She pressed her lips together as bitter and humiliating recollections swept over her.

"But what if your family oppose this step?"

She mused for a few moments: "I *had* thought if they opposed it I should merely insist on a separation."

"But now— Oh, Adèle, a few hours have changed everything. You will not let cowardice and prejudice come between you and me?"

She rose in great agitation, her breast heaved, and she pressed her hands together: "My mother is feeble and old beyond her years—Blanche is anxious about her health: if I saw that this was to be a great distress to her, I do not know that I could carry it through."

"A separation is open to every objection they could make to a divorce, and does not secure you any of the advantages."

"To how many people the chief objection is in a name! A separation would cause as much gossip, but it would come more quietly and gradually, as the situation would only be understood little by little."

"You must not yield," he broke out passionately. "If your mother would sacrifice your freedom and happiness to the fear of tattle, she does not deserve your duty. She should have stopped the match: she took no care of you."

Mrs. Atherton held up a warning finger: "I made my marriage myself: no opposition would have stopped it. That reflection long held me back."

"Adèle, I cannot leave you with this terrible uncertainty. If you should be induced to compromise, what misery for me! what misery for you! Promise me not to give in." He fell on his knees before her and seized her hands.

"I promise," she exclaimed with a

sudden revulsion. "Everybody has a right to their life, and I will live my own."

Ferdinand rose, exulting, triumphant, transported.

"Now go," she commanded, "and wait until you hear from me to come again: I do not want you to come until all is decided."

"But two days!—do not make me wait more than two days."

"If you were as happy as I you could afford to wait: I feel patient for the first time in my life," she said with a smile. "I will send you a line at the very first moment. Is it the old address?"

"The old address, to which so many little notes used to come, every one of which I have still." She flushed with pleasure and a glad light beamed from her eyes. "One word more, Adèle. Tell me when you began to love me, for it was not yesterday?"

"As soon as I had lost you hopelessly," she replied with a look which seemed to come from the deepest abysses of the past.

"Not hopelessly, O my love!" he repeated with joyful emotion.

"No, but till this evening I had no hope. Now go: good-night, good-night."

A long kiss, and they parted. She stood leaning against the doorway, watching him go down stairs, and he looked back at her graceful, magnificent attitude, thinking how much harder this lingering of hers made it for him to depart, yet greedily drinking the delicious flattery of her action.

CHAPTER IV.

If the laws which govern the origin and transmission of gossip could be discovered, it would be of great benefit to the world. How the little sporules of desire or purpose convey themselves from the inmost thoughts of the person most anxious to keep them secret to the fertile brains and loquacious tongues where their growth and dissemination will be most rapid is one of the mysteries of social life, which has its arcana as well as science. Certain it is that an unspoken design, a silently-cherished wish, escapes from private keeping and floats about until the air is full of it and everybody has heard of it, though nobody can tell where. Less than a week after Mrs. Atherton's arrival people began to hint at trouble between her and her husband, and to guess the motive of her return. Perhaps her strict seclusion created suspicion, for after her appearance at Mrs. Brown's dinner she was not seen again. Everybody who had seen her there except Ferdinand talked of nothing else for days—her looks, her dress, her conversation; her airs, the women added. She had made a sensation in that small circle: everybody else was eager to see her; it lay in her own power to be the rage. Visitors called and cards were left in packs, but "Not at home" was the invariable answer, whatever might be the hour; yet no one met her in the street.

Three days passed without Ferdinand's hearing from Adèle, and he thought no man had ever been put to such a test before—at any rate, no man of his sensibility. He ascertained, by calling at Dr. Kent's office, that they had not yet returned from New York, so that at least he understood the cause of the delay. With many precautions he sent Adèle flowers—a bunch half carnations, half dark pansies: after that there was nothing to do but wait. He read over all those little notes untouched for many years. He kept the letters of every woman with whom he had ever flirted, in spite of solemn adjurations to destroy them: he kept them in a very orderly way, each tied up with ribbon of a different shade. Adèle's was ruby, her favorite color. The intoxication in which he had left her presence subsided slowly, and on the third evening the inevitable reaction, the *moralisches katzenjammer*, set in. He waited until nine o'clock in hopes of a line from her, and then went to the club. "Atherton" was the first word that fell upon his ear, and as he did not wish to join in any conversation of which she was the subject, he took up the evening paper with the manner of a man who wishes to read: behind his

printed screen he listened with choler and disgust to the following dialogue:

"Depend upon it, that's what's up."

"I wonder whether she will sue for separate maintenance? I suppose she can get whatever she wants?"

"H'm! not so sure of that: she cut up her own shines abroad."

"Was there any man in particular?"

"Oh yes, very partik'lar. Breteuil, the Comte de Breteuil, the owner of Éclair, who won the Goodwood one year, had a mare called La Belle Rebelle, after the fair Secesh: he ran her at Chantilly the year I was there."

Ferdinand had remained silent with difficulty, because Adèle had so enjoined prudence upon him: he now looked over his paper and said, "There's no truth in those stories: I know it from somebody who was abroad at the time."

"I was in France myself," said the last speaker, "and knew a lot of men who belonged to the Jockey Club, and heard all about it."

"Did you know Breteuil?" asked Ferdinand.

"Well, no."

"My friend does, and contradicts the report out and out."

"When did you get your information?" persisted the other, unwilling to be put down.

"Within a day or two—since Mrs. Atherton came to town."

"Oh! How everybody is agog about her! I hear she's awfully handsome—a regular smasher. Have you seen her?"

"I saw her at Brown's, and called next day, but didn't get in."

"Nobody gets in. What's her game, do you suppose?"

"I don't know what her game may be," replied Ferdinand stiffly. "*I* didn't get in because I didn't ask: I only left my card."

The others, just then remembering his old devotion to Miss Hunter, exchanged a wink and pursued the theme in a strain less grating to the ears of a former lover. Their remarks turned chiefly on Atherton's notoriously bad character before his second marriage, and on his subsequent performances at home and abroad.

"He's a bird! Well, I hope she'll get shut of him. When she does, stand from under! She'll have everything—looks, tin, experience."

"Too much experience for me," returned the other. "One doesn't want a woman who has been through such a mill."

Ferdinand had no pretext for interfering again, but the conversation was insupportable: he threw down his paper, picked up one or two more and glanced at them, got up, nodded to the men and sauntered out. He was half mad with irritation, depression and self-restraint; and besides these disagreeable emotions he felt as if somebody had just found a flaw in his favorite diamond which took off half its market value.

Mrs. Atherton bore her voluntary imprisonment without chafing. It lasted nearly a week, during which her natural impatience and impetuosity seemed to have fallen asleep. She longed passionately to see Ferdinand again, but she was calm and contented in her newfound happiness. She sang, she embroidered, she sat with her mother, she played with her little nieces, she arranged and rearranged Ferdinand's flowers. She could not read, for her thoughts would not follow her eyes: she moved about in a glad trance, listening to a siren song in her heart—the voice of her youth, which had waked from a long silence to take up the old melody. At length the Kents returned, and she unfolded to her mother and sister the causes of her coming to the North. Their distress was very great and their consternation was unbounded. Mrs. Kent overflowed with sympathy for her sister, and wholly espoused her cause, but Mrs. Hunter was horrified at the mention of divorce, and entreated her daughter, in an appeal profuse with commonplaces, to try and bear. "Don't you suppose, my dear, most married women would have a sad story to tell if the truth were known? It is woman's lot, my dear, and 'forgive and forget' should be our motto."

"I have nothing to do with the wrongs of others," replied Adèle. "I hope there are not a great many married women

who could tell such a story as mine. Remember, too, that I have only told you what everybody knows wherever we have been in Europe or this country: I have not gone into my private grievances and personal wrongs."

"But you *will* tell us all about them?" said Mrs. Hunter, who would have enjoyed the catalogue.

"No, mamma: they are a separate chapter. The facts I have told you are undisguised, notorious: they justify my proceeding and ensure my obtaining what I want. As to forgiveness, Mr. Atherton has not the least desire for it; and it's no use forgetting what happened yesterday, when to-day and to-morrow are to be the same thing over again."

"But, Adèle, you should try and win him back, dear."

Mrs. Atherton made an impatient movement: "Mamma, as long as my trials were tolerable I did not trouble you with them: I have not come to you now to learn how to be reconciled with Mr. Atherton, but to consult as to the best means of arranging our separation."

"Oh, my dear, it's too dreadful! Think how people will talk."

"They can say nothing discreditable of me, and they can say nothing of Mr. Atherton but what is said every day. Besides, I am used to being talked about."

Blanche, indignant and grieved to the heart for her sister, was in favor of a divorce, but she urged consulting her husband; and of course Dr. Kent had to be called into the family council: fatherless and brotherless as they were, he was really the man of the family. To his wife's pain and surprise, he advocated a legal separation without a divorce. Adèle had foreseen rightly: he was prejudiced against her, and thought there might have been much provocation on her part, though not of a compromising nature. He had also a man's way of looking at the marriage tie—that is, as the best fetish for a woman—and a natural aversion to an open rupture which would involve his wife's name in *the general* discussion. He would have liked to thrash Atherton, an him besides, and he repelled Adèle's returning to him; but the matter could be arranged this conclusion Mrs. Hunter ingly brought. After two da ments and representations, A herself confronted by the unit of the family in favor of a Her mother and sister had be from opposite extremes to co safe and moderate middle co would leave no room for repro her.

Dr. Kent, who had brought over, explained his views to in-law, and wound up: "Th swer every purpose and sa deal of scandal."

Adèle swallowed her bitte controlled her rising anger: answer all my purposes. I sha his name; my position will alous; I shall be exposed tc mistakes and explanations; a prisoner on parole; I shall bond nor free."

A look of shrewd inquiry Dr. Kent's keen eyes, and h question which, if he had bee er a gentleman, he would not "You are not thinking of an riage, I presume?"

"Oh, Charley!" cried his

Adèle's eyes flashed, and "That is enough: I shall matter for myself, and what vice I need I shall ask from a I am sorry, mamma, to oppos Blanche, as you evidently ca more for appearances than my peace; but you can und latter's being of more importa

"Oh, Adèle, do not be so headstrong," entreated Mrs. her sister was leaving the ro

"Upon my word, this is much!" cried Mrs. Atherto for an instant upon the thresh ter ten years' matrimony even exemplary and far-sighted Blanche, you will be in a b tion to judge a woman who h ten years' insult and indignity

She went to her own bedroom and locked herself in, giving no answer to the knocks and entreaties of her mother and sister, who at length desisted and went away. She burst into convulsive weeping. So she must fight it out alone, without succor or support from the only beings to whom she could turn? It cut her to the quick that they should be ready to immolate her to the merest conventional scruples—for so she judged their advice—and some of the ire and gall which her brother-in-law had stirred up spilled over upon them: she felt as if the three were in league. Through this hurricane the image of Ferdinand returned again and again, ever with greater sweetness and soothing. She yearned to see him, and throw herself upon his breast and tell him all her troubles. There was a certain poignant delight in having no one but him to look to and lean upon. She turned over in her mind fifty devices for seeing him. She knew the dangers of clandestine meetings too well to attempt secret or underhand measures, yet she feared to set people talking if she allowed him to come openly to the house: she had an anxious desire to avoid gossip, more for his sake than her own. As she revolved expedients for communicating with him, her thoughts were diverted from the injustice and unkindness she had encountered in her home, and her sobs died away in long spasmodic sighs. A few carnations and pansies were still alive and fresh, tended by her daily care: she took them from a little cup and put them into her belt, over her heart, and then sat down to work out a plan for meeting Ferdinand. She was possessed by the desire to see him, to hear his voice, to have him beside her, to listen to the ardent tenderness of his protestations. There was an ugly chasm before her, but she had felt the nerve to cross it when nothing but an empty, arid future lay beyond: now on the other side she saw a world of sunshine and flowers. Her effort to concentrate her mind on ways and means strove with a tendency to sink into blissful reverie.

There came a knock at the door, and a servant's voice: "A letter for you, ma'am."

She opened the door, averting her proud head that her tear-stained cheeks might not be seen. It was a note from Ferdinand, and she opened it with a heart beating with pleasure. His impatience had overcome his prudence, and he had disregarded her prohibition. Nothing so delights a woman sometimes as disobedience to such a command, when it seems to arise from a mutiny over which the offender has no power—a mutiny instigated by a deeper fealty than obedience itself. He wrote as follows:

"DEAREST, DEAREST ADÈLE: If I break my promise not to write until I should hear from you, it is out of my intense solicitude for you. I have borne my banishment without a murmur, though I have been unable to eat or sleep or work from longing to see you again. I have refrained even from sending you more flowers, for fear it should become known. I have resisted the temptation of passing your house in hopes of catching a glimpse of you, lest it should attract notice. But I write from no selfish indulgence of my own impatience, and that is my excuse. I must say once more that I have loved you as long as I have known you, and loved but you, and shall love you alone while I live. You are the one woman on earth to me—the queen of your sex, my dream and divinity. To prove the height and depth of my affection I am going to make the greatest sacrifice mortal man ever made for the sake of her he loved: I am going to release you from your promise to resist your family if they advise you to obtain a separation instead of a divorce. You never can know what it costs me to do this: it is the sublimest renunciation; and only my intense sensitiveness for your welfare and reputation could enable me to make it. Already your affairs are being talked about. I know not how they have transpired: probably, your difficulties being known, people have drawn their conclusions from your presence here alone after so long an absence. I need not say that nobody could utter an un-

favorable word of you in my hearing, but I have had to silence more than one invidious tongue; and I have heard enough to show me what you must expect if you should pursue your intention. Your name would be the theme for every ill-natured gossip, for every insolent blackguard. Your least word or action would be brought up against you at the bar of society: you would have to run the gauntlet of all the envy and jealousy your splendid superiority has excited. Do not reply that you can bear this—that your past can bear the strongest light: no woman can estimate the ordeal beforehand, and a man would be a dastard who allowed her to incur it for his sake. I cannot go into the subject fully by letter: pray name a time when I can see you and talk it over with you. Alas! how different a meeting from the one I had looked forward to! I do not dare to write the thousandth part of what is in my heart, though it could do no more harm than if this letter were to fall into any hands but yours. For Heaven's sake, be careful — no woman can be too careful of appearances—and destroy it as soon as you have read it. Above all, do me tl justice to remember what I resign f your sake.

My love, my love, we both will wretched be.

"Yours, devotedly, F. W."

The next day Ferdinand, who w awaiting Adèle's answer in an ague suspense, received the following not

"DEAR MR. WEST: There is nothi like an old friend. Thanks so much your advice: it coincides exactly w that of my family. I should be r and obstinate indeed to reject the op ion of so many disinterested people w have my welfare so deeply at heart; b as I do not like half measures mysel shall let the whole matter drop. I ag with you that no woman can be too ca ful of appearances, and therefore thi it unwise to receive a visit from so d gerous a person as yourself; so I sl have to bid you adieu by letter, a start this afternoon for the South.

"Your truly obliged

"A. ATHERTON."

CHAPTER V.

A GREAT blow of surprise met Adèle on her arrival in Charleston, the news of which had crossed her on the way: Mr. Atherton had been struck by paralysis. Whatever projects she had formed on her journey were overthrown by this catastrophe, which, however, offered no solution of her difficulties. She had been so torn by the emotions and revulsions of the week in her mother's house that she was half distracted by this new event, and felt that she could come to no conclusions until she had rest of mind and body. She set off at once for the plantation, a horrible day's journey by stage. The railroad had been destroyed during the war, and was not yet rebuilt: the old stage-road, bad enough when it was the only highway, had been disused for years, and was now used again without having been repaired. Mrs. Atherton's fellow-travellers were all men. Two of them she knew by sight: they had been through the war, in which one of them had lost an arm, the other a leg, and were living at a small town in the interior, without making an attempt to retrieve the affairs of their ruined families. They were slovenly and unshaven, they smelt of liquor and chewed tobacco. Adèle remembered them five years before, handsome dandies in spotless linen, extraordinary striped or plaid clothes, gorgeous scarfs and showy sleeve-buttons and studs. They were among those who had cut Mr. Atherton on his return to Charleston, but they treated Adèle with extreme deference and courtesy, endeavoring to render her comfortable and pay her small attentions which their maimed and poverty-stricken appearance rendered pathetic. They wished tacitly to express their sympathy for her and to mark the distinction they drew between her and her husband. She understood well enough, but in the sickness of her soul was unable to talk to them, and met their advances with cold civility: they admired and respected her all the more, with a delicacy which belongs to Southern men of this class in their intercourse with ladies. Adèle's fine senses and luxurious frame, already battered and sickened by the long, rough railway journey, almost sank during those tedious hours. The stage, shabby, stuffy, smelling of the stable, of oilcloth, varnish, wheel-grease, and worse odors not to be analyzed, toiled and lumbered through the deep sand, or jolted and strained over the broken corduroy causeways to the verge of dislocating the passengers' limbs and spines. The groaning and creaking of the vehicle, which might be heard for a quarter of a mile through the lonely tracts, the crack of the tattered driver's whip, and his ever-recurring, unheeded exhortations to his stumbling horses, produced an effect on the nerves like chafing a raw spot. Looking from the window to get a breath of air, Adèle saw only frayed pine forests, stark and spindling, or melancholy expanses of dull-hued marsh, or blinking gray-white cotton-fields with the brown straggling stalks of last year's crop. At long intervals they passed a negro log cabin, squalid and solitary amid empty wastes, or still more rarely a white man's house of clapboards, more forlorn than the hut from the pretension of a tumble-down piazza and a whitewashed paling with half the pickets gone. Her partisanship for the South, like many fiery enthusiasms, had been an abstract idea, which had never reconciled her to the shabbiness and discomfort, the shiftlessness and dulness, of life there, ten times worse now than before the war. There was something purgatorial in that long day's drive with the hopelessness of outlook on every side, like a visible metaphor of the future which lay before her if she stayed; but she was too tired to think whether she would stay or not.

As Mrs. Atherton was not expected,

no carriage met her at the point where the private road of her own plantation branched from the stage-road; but there was only a mile to walk, and she was glad to stretch her cramped limbs. It was past the hour when the negroes leave the field, and she did not meet a living creature. "*Lasciate ogni speranza,*" she thought to herself as she passed through the gate into the dusk of the evergreen avenue which led to the house. She had parted from her husband without a word, leaving a note to tell him her intention in going to the North. She found him lying on a lounge in a wrapper, but dressed with his customary unimpeachable neatness. He had rallied in the week since his attack, and although one side was powerless his mind was as clear and his speech nearly as distinct as ever. He had not expected to see her again, but he betrayed no surprise when she came into the room: he smiled, and the slight distortion left by the paralysis exaggerated the habitual cynicism of his expression into a sardonic sneer. He was too acute not to calculate instantly that she must have started for the South before the news of his attack, sent by the overseer, could have reached her.

"So you have come back?" he began before she had spoken. "Wouldn't they have you at the North? I think myself it is hardly the place for a staunch Secessionist." She sat down wearily, and made no answer. "What was the difficulty?" he continued after a pause.

"I am tired, and if I can be of no use to you I will go to my room."

"Do not stay a moment on my account. Good-night. What a pity to have taken such a long journey for nothing!"

A short rest in the unbroken quiet of the plantation restored Adèle physically, but vigor and energy had been beaten out of her. She had turned her back upon the North with spirit and courage, goaded by bitter resentment, pride and outraged affection, and they had carried her through to the end: now she sank into a condition of listlessness and apathy which made her totally unlike herself. When she was fit to think about her affairs and plans, action seemed impossible to her. Her position was not essentially different from what it had been before her journey. She had long considered herself as released from dut or obligation to her husband: the acci dent of his illness did not alter their re lations. But Ferdinand West's desertio had destroyed every impulse and sprin of action within her. Before seeing hi she had said to herself that her life w but half ruined—that there were resourc and enjoyments out of which she cou build up a new existence. Now eve incentive and desire was gone: she ha lost even the wish to be free. She fe that she would not raise a finger to ga her liberty, and that if it were laid in h hand she should not know what to c with it. She shrank from exertion: da went by without her leaving the hous Then she would mount her horse ar strive by violent exercise to shake o the heavy dejection which weighed h down; but Care still sits behind th horseman, and she could not get r of the leaden load. She rode along th tangled paths of the blasted Southe forest between ragged, attenuated pin or gaunt live-oaks swinging with fun real gray moss, and Nature seemed dead as her heart. Sometimes she pas ed a clump of shrubs woven together an overrun by yellow jasmine, and, remem bering how she used to delight in it bloom and sweet, pungent fragrance she thought her senses were as dea as her feelings: she cared nothing fo its grace or color or perfume.

Mr. Atherton continued to improve he began to hobble about the house and to take drives. He had been ar immoderate smoker, and he returned to the practice against his physician's posi tive prohibition. He had always read great deal, and now with a cigar and book he appeared to be as well satisfie as he had ever been in his life. Yet h was a helpless and pitiable wreck: h suffered tortures from neuralgic pain and his stoical endurance moved th few persons who saw him to a compas sion which he did not deserve. No wo man who has not been brutalized is in

nt to the sight of physical suffer-
Adèle did what she could to alle-
his misery in an absent-minded
vithout thought or trouble. An old
who had been Mr. Atherton's body-
it, and who had been abroad with
ursed and waited upon him. Adèle's
rations consisted chiefly in saving
inful steps by bringing what he
l within reach; and this she did
t a word or look. She did not
his presence: she seemed uncon-
of it except when by some occult,
rocess of the brain she divined a
nd relieved it. Mr. Atherton had
seen her in this condition before:
l seen her defiant, sarcastic, scorn-
raged; she had shown hatred and
g of him; he had seen her almost
herself with grief; but this stony
ence was a new phase, and it
ned a feeble malevolent curiosity
. He knew that a crisis must
ccurred during her visit to the
but her absence had been so
hat he could not guess its nature.
l not have been a breach with her
for he saw her receive letters from
nd reply to them after weeks. One
e took a glass of water from him
his rising, and set it down on the
f the table, so that it fell off and
she hardly heeded it, and called
vant to brush up the bits, paying
her attention to the accident.
en young ladies set tumblers down
othing they are supposed to be in
hope that nothing so serious has
d." She looked at him as if she
tly understood: then as the mean-
hed her distant thoughts she raised
brows, but did not speak. "What
come of the Adonis I saw you
g with on the evening when I
e honor of proposing to you?"
vift vision of the ballroom and
and's reflection in the embower-
ror flashed upon her. She had
n that he and her husband had
et: she flushed at the recollection,
is words, but he saw that in some
ey had gone home. Indifferent
sgracefully unfaithful to her as
been, he had the masculine in-
consistency to resent the notion of her preferring another man. He spoke to her seldomer thenceforward, and only to thank her for some service, which he did punctiliously, or to address her in some covert sneer or taunt, of which she took no notice. Once only during this period she was roused from her mournful lethargy. One day her French maid laid out the dress she had worn on the evening of Ferdinand's visit: a spasm of pain — she could not tell whether it was physical or moral—shook her from head to foot: she told the woman to take the dress away and keep it for herself, but never to wear it before her.

In the spring, three or four months after Mrs. Atherton's journey, she fell ill of country fever, as the prevalent malady of those regions is called. To the surprise of the doctor and of the few people with whom they kept up any intercourse, Mr. Atherton manifested anxiety and concern. She had never been ill before, and she supposed that she was going to die: as long as she was aware of her own condition she rejoiced in the thought; but after a blank interval consciousness returned. She had been moved to a healthier neighborhood, and life was coming back. The languor of her convalescence was a different thing from that which preceded her illness: it alternated with bursts of impatience and irritability, and when winter brought back her full strength she was herself again.

The existence which then began for Adèle would have been a severe trial for the most cheerful and contented woman: the only variety in its monotony came from her own rebellious or despairing moods. Pity for Mr. Atherton's miserable state of health, and respect for what was considered his wife's Christian magnanimity, relaxed the coldness with which they had been treated on their return from Europe, and prompted some hospitable and friendly advances; but Adèle did not respond to them. Their neighbors were few and distant; she had always thought Southern society dull and tiresome, especially in the country; and she had no desire to renew relations which had bored her at the best of times. A

great change had come over the lives of those vainglorious, warm-hearted people: their poor little regattas and races and tournaments, which they had found so pleasant and esteemed so brilliant, were over: poverty and grief had stopped their junketing and put out the light of their homes. Adèle had formerly looked with contempt upon their diversions and their pretensions, but the cessation of gayety, the universal mourning of the land, lent weight to the pall which covered her life. She had never taken interest or part in plantation duties and occupations; and although the wheels creaked and stuck from the breaking down of the old order, she only shrugged her shoulders petulantly at the inconvenience and discomfort which ensued. Her maid took care of her, and old Joe looked after Mr. Atherton: she let the rest of the household get on as they could, without her supervision. The negroes were not attached to her: she had been an easy, generous mistress, but she had not understood their ways. Mr. Atherton had never hesitated to order the lash for a mistake or an omission while they were slaves: he was considered a hard master by other planters, yet the blacks had an affection for him because he was "maussa." The position which Mrs. Hunter and Blanche had taken about Adèle's divorce had estranged her from them: she declined to let them come to her in her illness, as her husband proposed, and refused to go to the North to confirm her recovery. She corresponded with them, but it was a mere form. Her long absence from her early home and the wandering life in Europe, added to something in her own disposition, had stood in the way of friendship. She felt alone in the world. Whether she still loved Ferdinand West, whether she had ever loved him, she could not tell: at times she believed her sentiment for him to be a matter of imagination, of association, of temporary excitement. He represented her youth, her happy time: he was not so much a man with whom she was in love as the impersonation, the *genius, of love* to her—the creation of *her unsatisfied* passionate heart, which

had appeared to her with ar
aspect of almost ideal beauty.
were other hours when the re
of one interview, and of the da
which had followed, drove her
with restlessness or desponde
cording to the humor of the m
abandoned herself to idleness
tia, or took long, lonely, furiou
rowed herself for half the day
low-looking river which wour
cypress swamps and salt mars
the confines of the plantation.
times she turned to her musi
singing and playing far into
She read French novels incessa
in her fits of dejection and ten
she read nothing else to her
never spoke to her husband ur
was some office to be performe
did not tax her much: she s
wrote business-letters for him
temperate smoking rendered
tremulous, and read aloud to l
evening when his eyes were tire
of books came two or three tim
he liked to dip into all the n
ture, even the poetry and theol
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she took whatever he put befor
indifference, but she read poetry
well as she sang. After having
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an object of interest, at least
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serve her caprices and changes
her eccentricities and excesses.
wear the same black silk dress
day from morning until nigh
box of clothes from Paris stoo
ed in her room: then on a su
would unpack it and put on an
new toilette three times a day,
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ton thought her as good as a p
feeling for him was passive, as
whom she no longer hated, bu
wronged her beyond forgivenes
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She knew that her chance of
a divorce was gone: for years
have had it almost any day, bu
time had gone by. It was alw
to her to go away from her hus

she could not make up her mind to do so: she did not altogether wish to do it, not knowing what she should do next. Sometimes she made and discarded half a dozen plans a day. The indecision lay in coming to a resolution: if she had seen clearly what she desired, she would have taken a resolve.

All this time Mrs. Atherton's conduct was lauded by the outer world, except by an ill-natured few, who said her husband must have a hold upon her or she would not keep so quiet. The sensation which had been produced by her journey to the North had been heightened by the news of her abrupt return, which became known at the same time as Mr. Atherton's paralysis; and it was universally believed that she had gone back to him on that account. Her own family knew that it was only a coincidence, but kept her counsel and their own, supposing that her remaining with him arose from magnanimity, for she had left them without speaking of her intentions. One person alone was in Adèle's secret, and every motive of honor kept him silent. While she was receiving unmerited credit she was deteriorating as fast as a woman can who is entirely removed from external temptations. She was surrendering to the foes within. She went over and over her past history, and contrasted it with the conventual seclusion and monotony of her present life: she said to herself that she was a prisoner, the prisoner of circumstances, and that some day chance would set her free and she would go back to the world. But the present was sometimes too tangible: it seemed to shut her up within solid walls. She would look across the marshes with a dark set face, from which the soft lines and rich color were gradually disappearing, and wonder whether beyond the wastes and waves there were great cities, the focuses of civilization, where life at its highest speed was eddying round for ever and people in thousands lived for pleasure, and if she had once whirled with them in full consciousness of the giddy motion—she, a lone atom drying up on the edge of a Southern swamp. Sometimes she thought that a change was coming over her—that her emotions were not so vivid nor her sufferings so keen nor her regrets so maddening as formerly. She perceived that she no longer found relief and a sort of satisfaction in riding when her horse was nearly ungovernable from want of exercise, nor in pulling her boat when the water was rough and the tide running fast: danger had lost the element of enjoyment for her. The morbid music which she loved no longer made her heart beat and her cheeks burn, and she fancied that she did not sing with her former power. She was perplexed: she could not recognize herself in this phase. One day the horrible thought struck her that she was growing old: it was like a blow from a knife, and rankled as if the blade had been poisoned. The fire of youth was dying out; her faculties were waxing dull; the time for living was on the ebb, and if opportunity tarried the capacity for enjoyment would be gone. The depression which followed this discovery exceeded anything she had felt before: it was interrupted now and then by a wild clinging to the years and powers which were escaping her—by a frantic determination to hold back the wheels of time until her day should come. At these moments she regretted with a sort of rage the temptations she had formerly resisted: she wished insanely that she had yielded to the Comte de Breteuil, who had been ready to blow his brains out for her; she wished that she had told Ferdinand that she would go to the end of the world with him on that night—*that* night!—and cut loose by one step from all that held and hindered her. She had a fierce impulse to throw herself away.

Mr. Atherton had read more French novels than Adèle, and worse ones, and he had a wide experience of the evil side of human nature, particularly in women. He guessed the cause of the ferment.

"Don't read any more of that stuff," he said one evening as she was struggling with a new poem of Browning's: "read one of the old ones—'The Statue and the Bust:' it will bring back your pleasant days in Florence."

As Adèle looked for the book she remembered that Breteuil had followed her from Nice to Florence, and understood her husband's allusion. As she finished his eyes were fixed upon her with a peculiarly mocking expression: "What an admirably-told story! I can feel for them all three, but most of all for the husband: that man has my sympathy. '*De te fabula.*' You do not understand Latin: a charming woman cannot be a blue. To translate freely then, I am sorry to inconvenience you—it is disagreeable to feel one's self in a lady's way—but I am afraid I cannot take myself off, gladly as I would oblige you."

Her eyebrows and nostrils went up at the corners: "I could take myself off if I pleased."

"Not so advantageously as a few years ago, I fear. It is a pity you let your chance slip."

"My chance is as good one day as another: I can go back to the North whenever I wish," she said, goaded out of her habitual silence by the memories the poem had evoked.

"But you did not find the North pleasant enough to stay there when you last went."

"I can go wherever I like. I can go to Europe: I have enough of my own to live upon."

"But not a *dot* for the Comtesse de Breteuil. Be patient, and you shall have your wages."

The coming of spring waked Adèle from her torpor, or if she were in one of her feverish moods soothed the tumult of her despair. Her regrets would take a gentler strain as she watched a sapling here and there come into leaf or a fruit tree into blossom against the dull, unchanging background of the evergreen forest. She would wish she could see the transparent green veil overspread the gray branches, the meadows grow into solid emerald, the whole earth wear its young face again. On one of these days she stood on the piazza and saw that the sky was of a paler blue than usual; there was a fluttering breeze; the air was filled with sweet scents—not the heavy perfume of the jasmine or magnolia, but the lively smell of the wild plum blossoms. These soft fluences produced an unwo of peace and vague hope. S the boat, and went to her ro hat and gloves; the wind her hair—which she still wo back *à l'impératrice*—into he stood before the glass to smo and saw for the first time two which made a white streak up ples. She started back with and hid her face in her hands. est pangs a woman feels in beauty are the first and th the knowledge comes like clap at first, while the last ra watched for so long that the extinction can hardly be told. moment Adèle watched for gra wrinkles as one counts the breath of the dying: she d herself as old and withered, in agony. From that hour in her heart.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Ferdinand West re he had lost Adèle for a seco was thrown into a turmoil and disappointment. He h culated the effect of his lette counted on seeing her agai yond that he had not looke haunted by her beauty, by th intensity which had swept aw ples and his prudence: the re of those few hours made all years seem pitched too low. a sort of melancholy, and hi turned. He tried various re resources for his maladies physical: he went abroad a winter at Pau, where he was *le bel Américain.* Here he who reminded him somewh Atherton, but with the diff there is between a few dro *ess bouquet* and the same s afterward on the pocket-ha But they had experience, and to sympathize with him. He

comfort in telling them his affair with Adèle: his silence on the subject at home had been painful to him. In narrating his adventures to new listeners it was so hard to leave out the most striking passage in his life that he found great satisfaction in these audiences of one, to whom he could tell all his story without betraying his heroine's secret. In the course of six months, however, he underwent some mortifications; he discovered that his fair consolers were inconstant. He went to Paris, but could get no farther than the suburbs of society, and found out that to succeed in Paris one must be very rich or very young, or something else which he was not. His practice was suffering by his absence, so he went back to America.

Several years passed, and he went on in better health and spirits, dragging along an existence which became constantly more tedious and vapid to him. He thought of marrying again, but nobody united the requisites which he demanded. He did not expect to encounter any difficulties on the side of the paragon young lady if he should find her: his having failed to win the only girls he had wished to marry, Adèle Hunter and Maud Searle, did not lessen his confidence in his irresistibility. It did not occur to him that women, maids as well as widows, are often ready to flirt with men whom they would not be willing to marry. Even in his flirtations and love-affairs, if they deserved the name, he was gradually falling back upon girls whom ten years earlier he would have pronounced raw, or overblown women who had been "talked about." In reckoning with his vanity he explained the choice of easy conquests on the ground of indolence, and said to himself that it was not worth while to take trouble unless one were serious. He was aware of vexatious lines across his forehead and at the corners of his eyes, and that his hair had receded from his temples and grown thin on the crown of his head, but he was persuaded that nobody knew this but himself. He was *not* aware of what other people knew perfectly well—that he stooped slightly and had grown hollow-chested, and that his complexion looked like a cut rose which has been a week in water. Like most men—and women—whose prerogative has been owing to personal beauty, he had once considered that pretensions based upon such claims become ridiculous after a certain age much in advance of his own: as he grew older the date slid along the scale, and he no longer looked upon fifty as the limit to a man's being dangerous. It would have astounded him to hear some of the married women laugh at his egotism and the young girls set him down as an old beau.

Events and adventures were becoming rarer as Ferdinand's chronicle grew longer, when one Sunday, going out to walk, he found himself entangled in the congregation pouring out of a church which was frequented by most of his fair acquaintance. As he inspected the little bonnets to see whether any of them belonged to his pretty friends, a tall woman in deep mourning passed him, making her way slowly through the crowd. He did not see her face, and her long crape veil, which was thrown back, fell over her shoulders and hid the outline of her figure; yet he got an impression which made him curious to see the features. As he pressed on to try and come up with her again, she disengaged herself from the crowd and crossed to the opposite side of the street: the step, the movement with which she stooped a little to raise her dress, the slow swing with which she walked on, were so graceful and stately that Ferdinand immediately crossed to the other side and strode forward to catch a glimpse of her face. Before he overtook her she raised her hand and drew her veil forward, and at the same instant his heart gave a start and began to beat faster. He had seen but one woman whose head was poised and whose shoulders sloped in that way. He reached her: hearing the step, she moved aside to let him pass, and half turned her head toward him. It was Mrs. Atherton. He raised his hat, and for a long minute they walked side by side, looking at each other without a word.

He spoke first: "When did you come?"

"A week ago: this is the first time I have been out."

He looked at the black clothes, and recollected that Mrs. Hunter had died suddenly about half a year before: he had wondered then whether the news would not bring Adèle on, but as weeks passed and she did not come, he dismissed the idea, and the faint perturbation which it had caused died away. Now they were face to face again after ten years' separation and dead silence. It was not in nature that he should be perfectly calm, but he ascribed his agitation to memories which had never lost their life. Adèle was forty now: one did not fall in love with women of forty. He scanned her as they walked on in silence. She showed her age—she had changed; she had lost; her roundness, her bloom, her rich color, were gone; her features were sharper, yet her face and figure were heavier. He experienced that secret solace, that vindictive pleasure, with which every man who has loved a woman in vain witnesses the decline of her charms.

"Where are you?" he next asked.

"At the old house: it has not been sold yet; the Kents are there still."

"It will be a sad break up," he said, not well knowing what to say.

"For them yes, I suppose—not for me, it is so long since I lived there."

"I should have thought there might have been associations—" he hazarded without looking at her.

"Oh, associations!" she returned in a hard, dry tone. "Associations themselves lose their meaning at last. I think it depends upon what one's life has been how much place the past occupies. In an uneventful existence, or one very scant of emotions, certain memories may loom up like landmarks, but in a different sort of career they are lost sight of, like fence-posts behind the first hill." He inferred that she must mean him to take this personally, but her intonation and manner were as devoid of significance or emphasis as if she were talking to a stranger.

"She never cared for me," he thought *with a prick of vanity.* He looked at her again: *had* she lost her looks, or was it only her youth that was gone? She no longer brushed back her hair, and the gray was visible to nobody but herself: it was still magnificent in mass and darkness. Her eyes were splendid as ever, and, what is uncommon, the lashes were still long and even, while the faint dark circles below them—brown, not blue as in a fair complexion—added to their depth; and these shadows, and a slight shade on her upper lip which enhanced the brilliancy of her teeth, together with the tint of her skin, gave her beauty a peculiar and striking Spanish character: in her sweeping black clothes she was really imposing. He remembered that ten years before he had thought her theatrical: there was something of the tragedy-queen about her now perhaps, but regal she was. They were nothing to each other—probably no two people in the town were as disqualified for any future relation as they two with that dead past between them—but she was still a singularly handsome, impressive woman, and he should like to have one or two more talks with her.

"May I come and see you?" he asked when he reached her door. "How long are you to be here?"

"Not quite a week more: I am going to Europe." He looked at her inquiringly. "I am a widow: did you not know?" The door opened: "Come and see me, certainly;" and she bowed and disappeared.

Adèle had been free for a month. Mr. Atherton's incessant smoking had brought on a second paralytic stroke, which put an end to that and his few other occupations. He left his entire property to his wife for her lifetime, without clause or condition: she had her wages, as he had promised. When this became known the Charleston people said he had behaved like a high-toned Southern gentleman, and they thought less hardly of him. Adèle was a rich woman, for her own fortune had been already nearly doubled by her mother's death. She asked herself what she should do with her money and the rest of her life. She felt like prisoners she had read of,

/hen suddenly released after too onfinement come back voluntarily ir dungeons again. She thought ould try living at the North, but she had been at home a week ;covered that it was not the place ', and she made up her mind not another city, but to go abroad. ıd said truly that associations had aning for her, but there was a phe- ıon connected with them of which d hitherto had no knowledge. Af- 'tain moral wrenches or convul- it seems at first as if the past, torn ly from us, would never cease to us. In time there comes a period ve believe it to be dead and buried ; ghost laid for ever; our former have expired and vanished with it; nes of our youth become as unsug- as words in an unknown language. in grave illnesses and accidents, the approach of death, men often to the forgotten language of early so at crises of life which mark an old memories revive and return eir former power and renew their pon us, while the interval fades ight. Adèle knew that going to Europe and turning her back ıer few kinsfolk and her country momentous step at her age: the ıapter she was about to begin probably be the last; and who tell what it would contain? Her ter with Ferdinand opened the yard gates and set the ghosts g again. With the essential dif- : between a woman and a man ers of sentiment, the changes she n him, instead of giving her grat- n, saddened her: she was more to him than if he had appeared her in undimmed brightness.

e early Sunday dinner Mrs. Ather- ntioned Mr. West's having walked rom church with her, adding cas- 'I used to know him very well, dined with him when I was here What sort of person is he now?"

Kent had not a suspicion that 'as anything more to be known, scanted without reserve upon Fer- , who continued to attract attention in society. He had not remarried, he made himself ridiculous by his coxcombry and perpetual flirtations, yet he had a good practice as a real-estate lawyer, and people put their property into his hands with great confidence.

"I am glad of that," observed Mrs. Atherton, "for I had heard something of the sort, and I think of leaving mine in his charge. I have asked him to come and see me, and as he knows that my time is short, he may be here this evening."

Her sister and her brother-in-law looked surprised, but he merely said, "You could not do better, I believe;" adding with professional instinct, "he has a troublesome cough, though."

They thought no more about it; and when Ferdinand called that evening according to Adèle's previsions, Mrs. Kent excused herself on account of her mourning, and kept the young people out of the way in order that the business-talk might be uninterrupted.

Adèle was sitting in a low crimson chair in the glow of an open fire. "She is handsomer than ever," thought Ferdinand as she rose slowly to receive him, majestic in her black robes: "she would grace a court."

The room had been refurnished: the position of the tables and chairs was changed; there was a new upright piano instead of the old square one; things were altered and unfamiliar. There was some constraint in the first sentences they exchanged. Ferdinand thought he had made a mistake in coming: after what had passed between Mrs. Atherton and himself, they could never again meet on common social ground, neither could they meet in any other way. He ought not to have joined her in the morning; he ought never to have sought to speak to her again; but it was too late to retreat, and he asked himself what they were to talk about. Adèle had a subject prepared. Although familiarized with the idea of subterfuge by her French novels, she had not practised it sufficiently to be comfortable under an untruth: she had told an unpremeditated falsehood, partly to account for Ferdinand's visit, partly

to secure them from intrusion, but she resolved to make it right with herself by acting upon it. "If you had not come to see me this evening, I should have sent for you to-morrow, as I have a favor to ask of you. I want you to be my man of business," she began in a matter-of-fact tone. Ferdinand looked at her in astonishment, disposed to think that she must be joking. "Old Mr. Duffie, who has looked after both Mrs. Kent and myself so long, has mentioned several times that he wishes to give us up: he has taken care of us long since, he gave up everybody else. When my mother's estate is settled there must be some changes: I shall not be here myself, and I must have somebody to act for me."

"I shall be very happy to serve you, but I did not come here to-night to talk business: it is a workingman's only holiday. Won't you let me enjoy it and make my professional visit some other time?" said Ferdinand, still surprised, and not altogether pleased at the prosaic turn things were taking.

"Oh, if you wish, but my time is very short, and we must have an understanding soon."

"You are going to Europe?"

"Yes, to live there."

"To live there!" There was a pause, during which each remembered how she had come before on her way to live in Europe, and he had met her and turned her back into the durance which had consumed her ten best years. Ferdinand was disturbed: already her reappearance had shut all other figures out of his horizon, and when it should withdraw he knew the vacancy and insufficiency she would leave behind. He looked round the room and saw the piano: "Do you still sing?"

She shook her head: "Music has gone out of my life."

"And of mine too," he said with a sigh. "But you have not lost your voice?"

"I don't know. I have not sung for nearly two years. I suppose I shall take up my music again in Paris."

"In Paris? in Paris? And what else *will you do there?"*

"I don't know, indeed," she replied, looking coldly at him with her dark eyes.

He sat for some time staring at the fire, and when he next spoke he hardly knew what he was saying until the sound of his own words reached him: "It is useless for you and me to try and talk like mere acquaintances. You should have some compassion when you remember what you have done to me. My love for you has ruined my life."

She turned her face full upon him, amazement, anger and scorn rushing swiftly over it; but if he had wished to break through her fence of conventionality, he had done so, and she did not request him to leave the house.

"*Your* life! But we will not go back to times which no longer seem part of my history. I make no accusations, but I assuredly answer none."

"Listen to me, at least," he began; and as she inclined her head silently he proceeded to make an eloquent justification of his own conduct; in which, if there was not much truth, there was a great deal of sincere self-deception which lent a genuine ring to his protestations: "You have never understood me or my devotion. I sacrificed myself to shield you, and you have counted it against me."

Adèle had gone through many changes of feeling toward Ferdinand during the past ten years—she had loved him, hated him, despised him, at length become indifferent to him—but she had consistently thought of him as a man who by his coldness of heart or moral cowardice had deliberately wrecked her. It was impossible for her to alter her view of him in a moment, but she listened to his passionate description of his struggles and sufferings in an attitude of mental antagonism rather than disbelief.

"What proof do you offer of all this?"

"I have never remarried nor been engaged."

"You have spent your time in flirtation and love-making."

"I have tried to find distraction; and I have had great temptations."

"You have made capital of your mis-

fortunes," she went on vehemently, inspired by a sort of *clairvoyance*. "You have dragged your love for me, my love for you, in the mire at the feet of every woman who has momentarily attracted you."

He rose and stretched out his hand: "On my word of honor, there is not a human being who has heard me mention your name except as a girl: there is no one alive who knows that I saw you here ten years ago. You do me mortal injustice." It was one of his old attitudes: he looked as handsome as his former self. "Why do you not think of me as you did ten years ago?"

"I had a romantic conception of you, and I was mistaken: that is all."

"It was no fault of mine if you idealized me, but it is very hard that you should cease to do so without cause."

"Not at all. You had the advantage of being 'idealized' for ten years: you cannot complain now that I have come to regard you without illusions. But do not let us fall into recrimination, at any rate: that is for lovers." She sighed.

"And we are not even friends? Adèle, let us—let us at least be friends."

Misfortune had produced a numbness in Mrs. Atherton's emotions which she had mistaken for their extinction, but coquetry and love of admiration and excitement were not dead in her. This was the first time since she had parted from Ferdinand that she had sat talking to any man except on matters of business. The dormant spirit of conquest began to stir: not the joyous coquetry of a young woman, but the anxious, ruthless coquetry of a woman who is on the wane, and who is eager to prove her own powers of captivation. If she had ever loved a man, it had been this one: had he really loved her? It would be a triumph to bring him to her feet, to make him renew the declarations and vows of past years: it would be a far greater test of her fascination than if he had not known her as younger, handsomer—before she was the broken woman she felt herself to be. She looked at him with an inscrutable expression and a flicker of the *Mephistophelian* smile.

"Friends? friends? We will see. You must begin by being my agent."

Ferdinand walked up and down the room, annoyed and mortified: "I am afraid you must excuse me: I really do not think I could meet you on those terms. I will find you a reliable person if you wish, but I cannot undertake it myself."

Adèle smiled again: "Friends, and you refuse my first request! The last time I saw you, you begged to be my lawyer."

"Adèle, do not torture me! If you cannot forgive me, say so and I will go away."

"But you have explained that you need no forgiveness."

He turned short about and came and sat down near her. "I see that all is over," he cried, "but let me have one hour to look back upon: we shall never meet again. Do sing for me."

"I cannot do that," she replied gravely: "even if I were sure of my voice, my sister would not like to hear the piano. I know that the girls have not practised for six months; and besides, it is Sunday evening. I will read to you if you like."

"Anything to be near you for a little while."

She rose with her commanding motion and took a book from a table: it was a volume of Matthew Arnold's poems. "Do you know these?" He glanced and shook his head. She turned to the poem of "Tristram and Iseult" and began. At first he paid no heed to the words, listening merely to the deep tones and metallic vibrations of her voice, and thinking of twenty years ago, and ten years ago, and now once more; but this was the end: she would go abroad, and they would not meet again. The first words which roused his attention were—

> And she too, that princess fair,
> If her bloom be now less rare,
> Let her have her youth again—
> Let her be as she was then!
> Let her have her proud dark eyes,
> And her petulant, quick replies;
> Let her sweep her dazzling hand
> With its gesture of command,
> And shake back her raven hair
> With the old imperious air.
> As of old, so let her be.

He could hardly believe that the words were in the book, but she read on, and he fastened his eyes upon her and followed as once he had followed her singing, yet his mind ran parallel on other thoughts. There was no such woman as this even yet: wherever she might go she would still be first. He had never loved another woman of them all: did he love her yet? He had wished to marry for years. She was a splendid prize: suppose he should win her at last? What did she mean by reading this poem with its strange coincidences? Was she playing with him, or was it encouragement?

Her voice took a deeper, more melancholy tone:

Vain and strange debate, where both have suffered;
Both have passed a youth constrained and sad;
Both have brought their anxious day to evening,
And have now short space for being glad.

She raised her eyes and met his gaze straining upon her: she went on, still glancing up at every line. As she read,

Nor thy younger Iseult take it ill,

a startled expression crossed his face. She paused almost imperceptibly, raised her eyebrows, and then continued, not looking up until she came to the words—

For those thou seest are unmoved,
Cold, cold as those who lived and loved
A thousand years ago.

Her voice sank slowly like one finishing an epitaph, and she closed the book and leaned back in her chair. Perplexed and troubled, he bent forward and took her hand. She gave a little shudder, then shook his frankly and said, "Good-night! I hope the poem has not tired you. It is a favorite of mine, but rather long: this is not all, but more than enough."

He was thrown back upon himself by her change of manner, but did not change his own: "May I not come back and hear the rest?"

"Oh, that is really the end—the third part does not belong to it: the poem ends there for me."

"Well, then, may I not come back to *see you?*" *he* asked gravely.

"Oh yes: why not?" she returned carelessly.

He bowed and left the room.

The next morning, when Mrs. Atherton came down stairs after a night of little sleep and many thoughts, a servant met her with a bouquet of rosebuds and forget-me-nots: she could not believe that they were for her, but her name was on a card which had come with them. She put them in water, and by and by went up to her own room, wondering what these flowers of youth might mean. She was dressing to go and see old Mr. Duffie at his office when a slip of paper was brought to her on which was written in pencil "Maud Hughes." It was very early in the day: a warm feeling rose in her heart: "She has just heard of my being here, and I have not seen her for twelve years." She ran down and entered the room, exclaiming, "Maud, I call this real friendliness!"

The lady beside the centre-table turned, and Mrs. Atherton stood still in astonishment: it was a young girl. "Oh, Mrs. Atherton, did you think it was mamma? I had no card with me: in fact, mamma won't let me sport a card of my own. Ours is 'Mrs. Hughes—Miss Hughes,' you know—me tacked to her skirts—and that seemed too formal to send up at ten o'clock in the morning. But you don't mind my coming so early, do you?"

"Won't you sit down?" said Mrs. Atherton, recovering her speech.

"You don't remember me, do you?" the visitor ran on. "I was six years old when I knew you in Paris, but I remember just how you looked; and you look just the same: you haven't changed a bit."

Miss Hughes looked extremely like what her mother had been at her age, but she was pretty, which her mother had never been. On the other hand, in spite of the utmost care in dress and every accessory, she was common.

"I suppose your mother sent you?" said Adèle, still expecting an explanation of this descent.

"Oh no. Mamma doesn't know you are here, or I'm sure she would have told us, for I've often heard her wonder what had become of you. It was a gen-

tleman friend of mine who has talked to me a *great deal* about you, who used to know you when you were my age, and made me so anxious to see you that when he told me you were here I made up my mind to come right away, without saying anything to mamma, as I knew if *she* knew she would want me to wait and come with her in visiting hours, and then we might have missed you: anyhow, I shouldn't have had you to myself."

"And when did your 'gentleman friend' tell you I was here?"

"Yesterday afternoon: he took a walk with me. Can you guess who it is?"

"I have not an idea," said Adèle calmly.

Something in her manner checked the flow of Miss Hughes's conversation: "I hope you don't think it was queer in me to come? I always do what comes into my head. But you have on your bonnet: maybe I'm keeping you."

"I was going to a business engagement."

"Oh, then I won't detain you. But I shall come again with mamma, to do my manners at a proper time and season. Meanwhile, I'm *so* glad to have met you!"

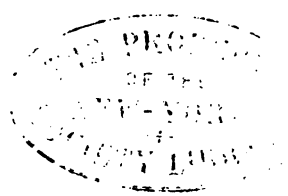
As she turned to leave the room she stopped at a side-table on which Adèle had placed her bouquet.

"Why that's the queerest thing! I often get bouquets like this, rosebuds and forget-me-nots: they're my colors, pink and blue—Pompadour, you know—and isn't it strange you should get one too?"

"You must have set the fashion," said Mrs. Atherton with a smile which would have frightened the girl if she had seen it, but she was absorbed in the flowers.

"Oh no, I don't flatter myself, but I never saw anybody else have one. And what's strange is, I *did* get a bouquet this morning, but it was half carnations and half purple heart's-ease."

Adèle took the flowers from the vase and dried the stems with her pocket-handkerchief. "I should like you to remember your visit to me," she said. "Take this bouquet, and when you see your gentleman friend again tell him from me it came to the wrong address."



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